

# Missing Links: An Analysis of the New-Creation Millennialism of Thomas Schreiner's Revelation Commentary

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## Abstract

The author assesses the effectiveness of Thomas Schreiner's exegesis of Revelation 20 in his recent technical Revelation commentary (Baker Academic, 2023). Schreiner boldly takes up the new creation millennialism interpretative paradigm, following J. Webb Mealy's monographs *After the Thousand Years* and *New Creation Millennialism*, but he resists one of the important consequences of that model, namely, that John's picture of the final fate of the stubbornly unrepentant is to be imagined as annihilation in a temporary pool (Gr. λίμνη) of fire, not, as commonly understood, as everlasting torment in a permanent lake of fire. The author argues that Shreiner's resisting of this element leads to an exposition that misses crucial ties between Rev. 19–20 and the Isaiah Apocalypse (Isa. 24:1–27:5) and to a disjointed and at points incoherent story of the end of the unrepentant.

## Keywords

Revelation 20 – millennium – new creation millennialism – lake of fire – Rev. 20:7–10 – Rev. 20:11–15 – Isa. 26:10–11 – Isa. 27:1–5

## 1. Introduction

Many readers will be aware of my 1992 monograph *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20*.<sup>1</sup> This was brought into some prominence by Gregory Beale's article-length review<sup>2</sup> and by his extensive interaction with me in his major critical Revelation commentary.<sup>3</sup> Recently I wrote a short monograph that made the argument in *After the Thousand Years* more accessible and reflected developments in my thinking since 1992, entitled *New Creation Millennialism*.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Schreiner's new commentary, *Revelation*,<sup>5</sup> has come out, in which, thanks substantially to his critical interaction with *New Creation Millennialism*, he follows the new creation

<sup>1</sup> JSNTSup, 70: Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992; repr. Seattle: Amazon, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> 'Review Article: J. W. Mealy *After the Thousand Years*', *EQ* 66 (3, 1994), 229–49, and see now J. W. Mealy, '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. by B. E. Reynolds, B. Lugjyo, and K. J. Vanhoozer, WUNT 2.369 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 131–53. The latter article contains my rebuttal of Beale's main criticisms of *After the Thousand Years* and a critique of Beale's own interpretation of Revelation 20 in his commentary (see next note).

<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Seattle: Amazon, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023).

millennialism (hereafter NCM) interpretative paradigm.<sup>6</sup> There are perhaps four central features of NCM:

- 1) **The Millennial Reign of Christ and the Resurrected Faithful Takes Place in the New Creation.** While seeing the thousand years of Rev. 20:1–10 as beginning when Jesus Christ comes in glory, making Rev. 19:19–20:3 a single scene,<sup>7</sup> NCM also understands that the new creation and the coming to earth of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21:1–2 *also* belongs at Christ's coming in glory. Comparing the wedding announcement of Rev. 19:6–9 with the vision of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, 'prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' in Rev. 21:2, without prejudice as to whether a new vision-scene in Revelation must follow chronologically after the one that precedes it, inevitably leads to the understanding that what John sees in Rev. 21 is another viewpoint on what is revealed in Rev. 19:11–21.<sup>8</sup> The former is the picture of the Bride on her wedding day; the latter is the picture of the victorious Groom on the wedding day (cf. Ps. 145:1–17). This understanding is corroborated by Rev. 6:12–14 and 16:18–21, which picture what appears to be a radical dissolution of the cosmic structure in connection with Christ's coming as Judge. It is reasonable to infer that the new creation also takes place at Christ's coming.<sup>9</sup>
- 2) **No Mortals Survive to Take Part in the Millennial Period; Gog and Magog are 'the Rest of the Dead' (20:5).** Since the transition from the present creation—home of mortal humans—to the new creation is seen as taking place at Christ's coming in glory, there can be no thought of mortals surviving to take part in the thousand years. Thus Gog and Magog, the hordes of would-be attackers of the 'Beloved City' in Rev. 20:8–9, must be 'the rest of the dead' referred to in 20:5. They, like the devil, had been consigned to the prison of the underworld 'until the thousand years were completed' (the phrase is identical in vv. 3 and 5: ἀχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη). Hence, when the devil is released from the underworld (20:7), so will 'the rest of the dead' be released, just as is implied in Isa. 24:21–22 (cf. Matt. 5:25–26). In the case of humans, to be released from the prison of Hades is to be resurrected (Rev. 1:18). Rev. 20:7–10 narrates the release, self-deception, re-offense, judgment, and fiery incineration of all unrepentant angelic and human beings.<sup>10</sup>
- 3) **Rev. 20:11–15 Recapitulates Part or All of Rev. 20:4–10.** Seeing Rev. 20:7–10 as narrating the resurrection and final destruction of the unrepentant leads to several possible approaches to the interpretation of Rev. 20:11–15. Schreiner prefers option a. below, and I incline towards b. or c.

<sup>6</sup> Beale, in 'Review Article', 248. "Paradigm shifts" are hard to accept, but Mealy has proposed one with respect to the millennium of Revelation 20, and it deserves to be ranked among the other millennial positions in the history of the interpretation of Revelation 20'. Schreiner—or his editor—styles the position as 'new-creation millennialism'. I prefer without the hyphen, by analogy to such formulations as New World ecosystems and new covenant theology.

<sup>7</sup> Note the clear parallel with Isa. 24:21–23.

<sup>8</sup> Several earlier passages in Revelation also appear to be revelations of Christ's coming in glory, e.g., Rev. 6:12–17; 7:9–17; 8:5; 11:15–18; 14:1–5; 14:14–20; 16:17–21. For full argumentation on this, see Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 59–91, 143–56.

<sup>9</sup> It is theoretically possible to argue that the creation remains in a state of dissolution and chaos for the thousand years, as do Uriah Smith, *Commentary on Daniel and the Revelation* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing, 2006 [1881]), and SDA scholars generally. But this option has nothing in the text to support it and leads to narrative incoherence—see *New Creation Millennialism*, 50–51, and *After the Thousand Years*, 230–35.

<sup>10</sup> The devil, both in Rev. 20:1–3 and in 20:7–10, apparently stands in metonymically for all the rebel angels who joined him in Rev. 12. The final and total demise of the great dragon, head of the rebel hosts of heaven (Isa. 24:21; cf. Rev. 12:3–4, 7–10), does not happen when the LORD comes in glory and incarcerates him (Isa. 24:22 || Rev. 20:1–3), in the context of the complete collapse of the earth and the demise of mortal humanity (Isa. 24:1–23), but much later ('after many days', 24:22), in the context of the glorious kingdom of God on the earth (cf. Isa. 24:23; 25:6–10a; 26:1–3; 27:1–5).

- a. One can see Rev. 20:11–15 as a recapitulation of Rev. 20:7–10, reading the relative clause of v. 11, ‘sitting upon it was he from whose presence earth and heaven/sky fled, and no place was found for them’, as a description of the Enthroned One,<sup>11</sup> rather than as a description of narrative action. Thus the judgment scene of vv. 12–15 pictures what happens to the ‘rest of the dead’ *after* the thousand years.<sup>12</sup>
- b. One can see Rev. 20:11–12 as recapitulating the judgment of the dead in Rev. 20:4, with focus on those in Hades, i.e. the unrepentant dead, since the faithful (in the period between death and resurrection) are pictured as resting in heaven in Revelation, and sinners are pictured as imprisoned in the underworld of Hades (cf. Rev. 5:9–11; 12:12; 13:6; 14:2–3, 13; 15:2–3; contrast Rev. 1:18; 6:8). When the earth flees away at Christ’s coming in glory (Rev. 6:14; 16:20), the dead find themselves exposed in the underworld like sardines in a sardine can when the lid is rolled away. They are then, as is standard teaching in the NT, judged by their deeds in mortal life, which are pictured as recorded in heavenly record books (20:12). Then, as the readers expect, having just seen/heard it, the unrepentant dead are drawn out from the underworld (out of the sea and death and Hades, v. 13) and are judged—not all over again on the basis of things they did in mortal life, since being refused resurrection and being incarcerated in the underworld for the thousand years was their sentence for living unrepentant lives as mortals, but rather, on the basis of their deeds, i.e. their behavior, *as resurrected people* (v. 13). What follows, to all intents and purposes, is the same as in the previous scene: inundation in incinerating fire from God (Rev. 20:13–15 || 20:8–10).
- c. One can see Rev. 20:11–15 as an elaborative recapitulation of Rev. 20:7–10 as in a. above, but with v. 12 being imagined as a parole hearing after the thousand years, in preparation for the resurrection of ‘the rest of the dead’, in which the facts leading to their exclusion from the millennial kingdom are reviewed (rather than their being judged for the first time after the thousand years, as in a.), and then they are raised and judged for their recidivist actions in resurrection (v. 13), leading to their incineration by divine fire (again, Rev. 20:13–15 || 20:8–10).

4) **‘The Second Death’ is Pictured as Instant, Total Incineration.** Arguably, the most remarkable and theologically interesting feature of NCM is its exegetical insight that the consignment of the resurrected unrepentant to the lake (actually a pool, Gr. λίμνη<sup>13</sup>) of fire is one and the same event as fire coming down from heaven and instantly incinerating them in a flood of fire. That the resurrection and final fiery destruction of the unrepentant appears in both Rev. 20:7–10 and Rev. 20:13–15 implies elaborative recapitulation and thus *two* narrations of the final fate of the resurrected unrepentant—the first being cast in battle imagery, the second in courtroom imagery. The idea that the same judgment can be both a battle and a trial at the same time is proven by the fact that we see both battle and trial

<sup>11</sup> Gr. οὗ ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου ἔφυγεν ἡ γῆ καὶ ὁ οὐρανός καὶ τόπος οὐχ εύρεθη αὐτοῖς, cf. Rev. 6:14; 16:18–21. On this, see, in detail, *After the Thousand Years*, 160–67.

<sup>12</sup> This is Schreiner’s tentative view; see *Revelation*, 681, 700–703.

<sup>13</sup> LSJ first definition of λίμνη is ‘a pool of water left by the sea or a river’. See, e.g. Ps. 107:35: ‘He turns a desert into pools of water’, evoking God sending abundant rain and causing life to flourish where rain has mostly been absent and life scarce. It is easy enough to picture the ‘river of fire’ that comes from the throne of God in Dan. 7:9–11 going forth to inundate and incinerate the fourth beast (cf. Rev. 19:20). It is equally easy to imagine that the deluge of fiery destruction that comes down from heaven upon the resurrected unrepentant in Rev. 20:9 gathers into a great pool that incinerates not only them but the devil (20:10).

imagery for the same judgment event in Daniel 7, Rev. 11:18, and Rev. 19:11–20:6. The battle *is* a trial, and the trial *is* a battle. These are two aspects of the same judgment, both at Christ's coming in glory and at the resurrection of the unrepentant after the thousand years. This observation in turn opens a hermeneutical option that has profound theological implications. Since the pictures of instant incineration and everlasting torment cannot both be taken literally, one must choose one or the other as the more literal, and the other as the more figurative. Strong arguments can be made that the picture of instant incineration (i.e. annihilation)<sup>14</sup> is the one that is to be understood the more literally, and that the picture of everlasting torment is the one that invites being taken the less literally (see below). If these arguments prevail, then a theological anomaly that has undermined the church's message for almost 2,000 years can be left behind, leading to an understanding of the larger story of the gospel that is no longer sharply out of harmony with the character of God as God proclaims it to Moses (Exod. 34:6–7; cf. the universal application of this in Ps. 145:8–9, 13b) and as taught by John: 'God is love' (1 John 4:7–8, 16).

In his new Revelation commentary, Thomas Schreiner joins evangelical NT scholar Eckhard Schnabel<sup>15</sup> in affirming these four main features of NCM, while pulling back from the theologically significant conclusion that the lake/pool of fire symbolizes total incineration, i.e. annihilation, and not literal everlasting torment. This article will critically examine the success of Schreiner's commentary in making good exegetical sense of John's vision narrative without embracing the incineration reading.

## 2. *On Rev. 20:4–5 as the Judgment of the Dead*

Schreiner recognizes in his comments on Rev. 11:18 that the day of Christ's and the Father's glorious Parousia as co-Judges of the living is equally the day of the judgment of all the dead and the giving of rewards to all the faithful (*Revelation*, 414–15). But because he understands those whom John sees sitting on thrones in Rev. 20:4 as the faithful (so that John supposedly sees them on thrones and then paradoxically sees them rise and reign), he appears to underplay the deep connection between the judgment scene of 20:4–6 and its prophetic sister scene of Dan. 7:9–10:

9 As I looked,  
**thrones were placed,**  
 and the Ancient of Days took his seat;  
 his clothing was white as snow,  
 and the hair of his head like pure wool;  
 his throne was fiery flames;  
 its wheels were burning fire.  
 10 A stream of fire issued  
 and came out from before him;  
 a thousand thousands served him,  
 and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him;

<sup>14</sup> The question as to whether one is to imagine those incinerated being removed by the Creator from the creation altogether, or simply broken down into their smallest constituent elements and recycled for the good of the creation, need not be answered. It is of no theological consequence.

<sup>15</sup> See *40 Questions on the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), and more recently, 'The Viability of Premillennialism and the Text of Revelation', *JETS* 64.4 (2021): 785–95.

the court sat in judgment,  
and the books were opened.<sup>16</sup>

The picture of God here as the Judge of creation, with his court of co-assessors, evokes a familiar theme in the OT, that God's big decisions are normally undertaken with the concurrence of the divine council. We see this in Gen. 1:26 in the phrase 'Let us make humankind', and in Gen. 3:22, where the divine voice says, 'Look—the human being has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, therefore...' The implication is that the divine council joins the decision to withdraw human access to the tree of life. In Deut. 32:9 we have the statement that God apportioned (management of) the various nations of the world 'according to the number of the sons of God', and in Job 1–2 we see God presiding over the divine council, again described as 'the sons of God'.<sup>17</sup> Uncertainty on the part of Revelation commentators about who the 24 elders are does little to undermine the probability that they, with their crowns of high rank and their thrones (4:4; 11:16), are to be understood as symbolizing the divine council. On the other hand, as Schreiner suggests (*Revelation*, 223–24), they may be angelic representatives of Israel and the church. The fact that John sees them continuously bow down and offer their crowns to God (4:10–11; 11:16) shows that they exercise their authority humbly and accountably. The result of the world-judgment in Dan. 7:11–14 is fiery incineration for the fourth beast and vindication and reign for the persecuted faithful 'for the age—indeed, for the age of the ages',<sup>18</sup> directly paralleling Rev. 19:19–21 + 20:4–6. The fact that Rev. 19:19–20:3 is also paralleled by Isa. 24:21–23 should not distract us from this clear inter-prophetic cross-reference to Daniel 7 on John's part. In fact, the most likely reason for John's curt reference to 'thrones, and they sat on them', is to make the specific cross-reference to Daniel 7. He wants his readers to understand that he recognizes what he is seeing in his vision to be the same judgment event that Daniel saw. This kind of allusion is a central feature of John's compositional technique.

In my view, seeing the faithful as those who sit on the thrones in Rev. 20:4 risks obscuring John's intention that this scene be understood as *the judgment of the dead*, corresponding to *the judgment of the living* just narrated in Rev. 19:11–21. Readers know that Christ comes in glory to perform *both* these functions (see Rev. 11:18). The living faithful are presumably among Christ's royal armies in 19:11–16, implicitly affirming their vindication in this judgment (so Schreiner, *Revelation*, 648), and the living unrepentant are slain and removed to the underworld, indicating their condemnation (19:17–21; cf. 1:17–18; 6:7–8). Clearly the holy and faithful ones who live to see Christ's coming in glory will reign with him, since they conquer with him (cf. 3:21), whereas the slain unrepentant will remain incarcerated for the thousand years in the prison of Hades (20:5). In this vision of the world-judgment with focus on the dead, we see two outcomes: (1) the faithful (particularly those slain for their testimony) are vindicated by resurrection and a thousand years of priestly reign with Christ, whereas (2) 'the rest of the dead' are rejected and remain confined in the underworld for the thousand years. The refusal of resurrection for those found unworthy of it (cf. Luke 20:35; Phil. 3:11) represents the basic nature of the punishment to which they are

<sup>16</sup> The readers of the commentary will get just a few remarks from Schreiner about Dan. 7:9–14, 15–28: 'Elsewhere we see that the saints possess the kingdom and rule through a "son of man" (Dan. 7:13–14)' (686). Later on the same page: 'As noted earlier, the Danielic vision is fulfilled where we are told that the saints will receive and possess the kingdom and will be given the kingdom forever (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27) ... The focus isn't on the vindication of believers but on their rule because they sit on thrones, and they "reign" (*ἐβασίλευσαν*) with Christ for a thousand years'. Then on 688, wrapping up the comments on 20:4: 'Here we have the fulfillment of the promise given to the saints in Dan. 7, where they are promised that they will rule and that judgment on their behalf will be declared (7:18, 22, 27)'.

<sup>17</sup> For a negative interaction between God and certain members of his council, see Ps. 82.

<sup>18</sup> Dan. 7:18; Aramaic and OG; cf. 7:24b–27; Rev. 20:4, 6; 22:5, Greek.

sentenced—lengthy imprisonment (cf. Isa. 24:21–23; Matt. 5:25–26; 18:34–35). They do not get to enjoy the glories of the fully-manifested kingdom of God, Messiah Jesus, and the faithful on the earth. They ‘will not get out of there’ (the prison of Hades), ‘until [they] have paid the last cent’. At least upon the realization that this is their fate, they will be ‘weeping and gnashing their teeth’<sup>19</sup> in fruitless yearning and too-late remorse.

My point here is if that Rev. 20:4–5 is rightly understood as a vision of *the* coming judgment, the judgment of all humanity, living and dead, that Jesus and the writers of the NT say will take place when he comes in glory, then *it is not a half-finished judgment*. John does not encourage the idea that judgment for ‘the rest of the dead’ (20:5) has merely been deferred, and will only take place later. On the contrary, the dead are judged, as announced in Rev. 11:18, and the unrepentant are subjected to the divinely-imposed penalty for their sins in mortal life: one thousand years in the prison of Hades. One can reasonably imagine differential punishments in that condition, metered to the severity of the wrongs people have done in their lives<sup>20</sup> and their own beliefs about how much others should suffer for doing those things.<sup>21</sup> In that way there would be a fully-meaningful sense in which they were judged ‘according to their deeds’, an oft-attested biblical concept emphasized in Revelation itself.<sup>22</sup> The significance of this observation will become clear below.

### ***3. On Rev. 20:7–10 as the Resurgence of the Devil and the Resurrected Unrepentant ‘When the Thousand Years are Completed’***

Schreiner, holding to conventional evangelical teaching, insists that Gog and Magog, i.e. the resurrected ‘rest of the dead’ (20:5). are not being given a second chance:

Mealy’s (2019: 32–33, 36–37) claim that those who disbelieve are raised for the purpose of being judged—i.e. that they are raised to see if their behavior warrants life at the end of the thousand years—isn’t plausible. When the unbelieving dead are raised, they are not given a second chance to believe. They show that their judgment is deserved by joining Satan in his final rebellion.<sup>23</sup>

What judgment is Schreiner talking about here? If he is talking about the judgment for the purpose of which they have been resurrected, then some difficult questions arise. As argued above, they have already been judged, condemned, and sentenced, and they have already served their sentence. Why are they being judged again, if not to examine their behavior as resurrected people (per John 5:21–29)?<sup>24</sup> And if they *are* going to be judged for their behavior in resurrection, how are they not free to behave well if they so choose? And how does the principle not apply to their situation, ‘If you do well, will you not be accepted?’ (Gen. 4:7; cf. Ezek. 18:32–33; 33:11)?

If, on the other hand, Schreiner, in speaking of ‘their judgment’, is referring to the judgment at Christ’s coming, the result of which was that they were denied resurrection for the thousand years (20:4–5; cf. 11:18), then even if it is true that their re-offense ratifies God’s wisdom in sentencing

<sup>19</sup> Matt. 8:12; 13:42; 13:50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28; cf. Luke 16:23–24; Isa. 65:14.

<sup>20</sup> A ready example is the very different experiences of the rich man and Lazarus in Hades. For the latter it is a place of long-sought rest and comfort; for the former it is a place of fiery torment (Luke 16:23–24). Essentially, people’s experience of Hades (both before and after the judgment) can be anything that God wants it to be. This principle also puts to rest the quibble that people will spend wildly different amounts of time in Hades.

<sup>21</sup> Matt. 7:1–2. For some reason, few seem to take this clear teaching of Jesus into account in their thinking about punishments.

<sup>22</sup> Rev. 2:23; 18:6; 20:12, 13; 22:12; cf. 2 Chron. 6:30; Job 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Isa. 3:10–11; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 7:3, 8–9, 27; 18:30; 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8; 1 Pet. 1:17.

<sup>23</sup> *Revelation*, 688–89 nt. 37.

<sup>24</sup> Note the use of *χρίσις*, judgment, not *κατάκριψα*, condemnation, in John 5:29.

them to long incarceration, that does not logically imply that they are somehow not free to change their attitude and behave rightly when they are resurrected. According to the logic of the narrative, they are deceived by the devil (and the devil deceives himself along with them), because he and they are free to decide how they will understand their place in the glorious kingdom—whether they will acknowledge the undeserved gift of renewed life and agency, give thanks, and learn to live in peace and harmony (shalom) with those who already live in that kingdom, or whether they will turn again, like the dog to its vomit and the pig to its wallowing hole, and fall into envy, self-deception, hatred, and covetousness all over again. *That choice constitutes, ipso facto, a second chance.* It is hard to think what possible theological problem there could be with this. They have already been justly punished for their misdoings, so none of them has gotten off lightly despite never having repented. *What if* God has a plan to give them one last chance to turn to him and live—as he says he is minded to do by nature (Ezek. 18:32–33; 33:11)? What person, trained into the character of Christ, could have any objection to this? The problem, one could argue, is that it is hazardous to base such a theory on a text that at most only implicitly suggests a chance to repent and turn to God, and which stands alone in Scripture. That is a very fair point. But Rev. 20:7–10 does not stand alone, and in clearly parallel prophetic passages the *grace* and the *choice* are right on the surface of the narrative.

John's narrative in Rev. 19–21 shows close parallels at multiple points with the Isaiah Apocalypse, Isa. 24:1–27:5. We saw above, for example, that Rev. 19:19–20:3 strikingly parallels Isa. 24:21–23. Similarly, the picture of the intimate fellowship between God and the faithful in the New Jerusalem, the new Mount Zion in the new creation in Rev. 21:1–4, 9–11 closely, and with obvious intentionality, parallels the promises given to the faithful of all nations in Isa. 25:6–10a. Similarly, the picture of a New Jerusalem with walls divinely constructed of pure transparent jasper (Rev. 21:18), with the hint that it is God himself who is the wall of protection, since he, who is her light source (Gr. *φωστήρ*, 21:11; cf. 21:23),<sup>25</sup> is also twice pictured as a precious jasper crystal (21:11; 4:3). Given these multiple connections, consider this passage in Isaiah 26, which comes immediately after the description of the banquet for all nations in God's glorious kingdom on Mount Zion, outside of which an emblematic enemy, Moab, finds itself miserable outside (Isa. 25:6–12).

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

<sup>1</sup>We have a strong city;

    he establishes salvation  
    as its walls and ramparts.

<sup>2</sup>Open the gates,

    that the righteous nation, the faithful, may enter in. (cf. Rev. 21:25)

<sup>3</sup>You keep him in perfect peace

    whose mind is stayed on you,  
    because he trusts in you.

<sup>4</sup>Trust in the LORD forever,

    for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock'.

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<sup>25</sup> The word *φωστήρ* does not mean 'radiance' or 'brilliance'. No passage in extrabiblical literature requires this meaning, and the immediate context strongly favors the idea that God, whose glory illuminates her, is her light source—metaphorically, her sun (cf. Rev. 21:11, 14). 1 Esdras 8:76, cited by BAGD, is actually far better suited to the normal meaning than the supposed secondary meaning. See my forthcoming article, 'God as the *Φωστήρ* of the New Jerusalem'.

<sup>9b</sup> [W]hen your judgments are in the earth,  
 the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.  
<sup>10</sup> Grace/Mercy is shown to the wicked,  
 but he does not learn righteousness;  
 in the land of uprightness he turns to wickedness (Heb. *yə 'awwēl*, piel of *'āwal*)  
 and does not see the majesty of the LORD.<sup>26</sup>  
<sup>11</sup> 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. 26:1–4, 9–11)

Isaiah prophesies that God will supernaturally protect the faithful in the new Jerusalem of God's glorious kingdom with his own salvation (26:1–4; cf. 24:23), while old enemies will be metaphorically treading water in a cesspit of their own waste (25:10b–11). The latter passage is arguably an apt, if crude, description of unrepentant people forced to face the reality of their own sins and their consequences in Sheol/Hades. They learned righteousness whether they liked it or not when they were judged and sent to the pit (26:9; cf. 24:1–22). But then 'favor is shown to the wicked' (Heb. *yuḥan rāšā'*). Last we heard, the wicked had been consigned to the pit of Sheol 'for many days' at the time God had established his glorious kingdom (24:21–23). A reasonable proposal is that the grace shown the wicked is that they are drawn out of the pit of the underworld, where they had been miserable and utterly impotent. Now they stand, on parole, in 'the land of uprightness', on God's turf. In their wickedness, they fail to see that it is divine grace and mercy that has stood them on their feet again, releasing them from the penitentiary of Sheol. They are self-deceived, unable to see God and the glory of God that pervades his kingdom. All they think of is to covet and capture by violence. Their end is fiery incineration.

This picture maps squarely onto the picture in Rev. 20:7–10 as a picture of the resurrection and final destruction of the unrepentant. Isaiah's narration in the historical present of a would-be attack on the faithful in glorified Jerusalem, met with consuming fire from God, looks exactly like the same story. The main difference is that in Isaiah 26 the ability of the would-be attackers to try something against the community of the faithful is characterized as stemming from divine grace/mercy (26:10a).<sup>27</sup> What comment does Schreiner have about Isa. 26:10–11 as a prophetic co-text with Rev. 20:7–10? None. It does not appear in his index.

Consider the following passage, Isa. 26:20–27:5, in which grace and mercy are even more obviously being shown to the would-be attackers of the community of God's beloved:

Isa. 26:20–27:5

<sup>20</sup> Come, my people, enter your chambers,  
 and shut your doors behind you;  
 hide yourselves for a little while  
 until the wrath is past.  
<sup>21</sup> For the LORD comes out from his place  
 to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;

<sup>26</sup> Robert Alter's translation in *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, interprets this verse as focusing on the self-deception of those shown mercy: 'on earth he twists what is straight, and he does not see the LORD's majesty' (Kindle edn; London: W. W. Norton & Co, 2019), 1817.

<sup>27</sup> Heb. *hānan*, the verbal form of a root whose adjectival form, *hannūn*, God proclaims as his own attribute (Exod. 34:6; cf. the psalmist's celebration that the attributes God proclaims in Exod. 34:6–7 extend to all created beings, Ps. 145:8–9, 13b).

the earth will disclose the blood shed on it,  
and will no longer cover its slain.

The immediate context for God's call for the faithful to go into their inner rooms in Isa. 26:20 above is the promise that the faithful, attacked and despairing of life, will be rescued by resurrection and will awake and sing for joy (26:19). Thus it is reasonable to see 'my people' in v. 20 as the community of the resurrected faithful, living safely in the glorious kingdom where death and crying will be no more (25:8). Indeed, the citizens of Zion/Jerusalem have recently been seen celebrating and singing about God's salvation and ongoing protection:

Look! This is our God!  
We waited for him, that he might save us...  
Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation!  
...  
In that day, this song will be sung in the land of Judah:  
Ours is a strong city!  
he sets up salvation  
as walls and fortifications! (Isa. 25:9; 26:1)

Since Isa. 26:20–21 maps far better to the safe and secure situation in the glorious kingdom than to the moment of despair leading up to it (26:17–18), it also maps narratively onto Rev. 20:7–9 far better than to Rev. 19:19–21. Similarly, Isa. 27:1 (which follows immediately upon Isa. 26:21), announces the ultimate slaying of the great dragon (on which see below), which would map to Rev. 20:10, not to the imprisonment of the devil in Rev. 20:3. The devil's capture and imprisonment, for John, would map to the *inauguration* of the glorious kingdom and the imprisonment of the rebel hosts of heaven, especially the devil (Isa. 24:21–23 || Rev. 19:19–20:3).<sup>28</sup> The picture evoked in Isa. 26:20 is that of an attempted attack on the faithful in the context of the glorious kingdom, which God anticipates and quickly and decisively thwarts,<sup>29</sup> his wrath leaving the corpses of the would-be attackers slain on the ground (26:21), just as in Isa. 66:22–24.

On the same day that God swiftly destroys those who intend to attack his people ('*ammi*', sg., 26:20), God will slay the great dragon. And on that very same day (*bayyōm hahū*', 27:1, 2), God will have a little talk with those who may have it in mind to attack the beloved community of his faithful ones, his beautiful vineyard:

<sup>28</sup> The 'host' of heaven that is judged and cast into the pit in Isa. 24:21–22 is, of course, an *army* (Heb. *ṣəbā*) of rebel angels. We have seen this before in Revelation: the devil's army of rebels fights Michael and his angels, is expelled from heaven. They are not imprisoned in the underworld at that time, but confined to the realm of the earth under heaven, where one presumes they run riot along with the devil (Rev. 12:4, 7–12).

<sup>29</sup> It is common for commentators to link the 'short time' of the devil's freedom after his thousand-year imprisonment (*μικρὸν χρόνον*, Rev. 20:3) with the little while that God will require to remove the enemies in Isa. 26:20 LXX (*μικρὸν ὥστον ὥστον*).

27:1 On that day the LORD with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish<sup>30</sup> Leviathan the fleeing serpent,<sup>31</sup> Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.<sup>32</sup>

2 On that day:

A pleasant vineyard, sing about it!

3 I, the LORD, am its keeper;  
every moment I water it.

I guard it night and day  
so that no one can harm it.

4 I have no wrath—

Will someone give me briars and thorns in battle?

I will march against them,

I will burn them up completely.<sup>33</sup>

5 Instead, let them take hold of my protection.

Let them make peace with me.

Let them make peace with me.<sup>34</sup>

In the glorious kingdom, in total contrast to the situation pictured in Isaiah 5, the holy community will be fully pleasing to God; they will bear fruit in great and even worldwide abundance (cf. Isa. 5:1–7; 27:2–3, 6). They will also, as celebrated in song in Isa. 26:1–4, enjoy God's full supernatural protection. On the day that God finally *slays* the great dragon, whom John identifies as the devil (Rev. 20:2; cf. 12:3–4, 7–17), God will offer not only protection, but reconciliation and peace, to the very ones who seem to be thinking of attacking his faithful (vv. 4–5). But the invitation also comes with a warning: if you try to bring harm to my beloved community, I will burn you up completely—I will incinerate you like a pile of thorny weeds.

Here the divine grace and human choice that are implicit in the logic of Rev. 20:7–10 are right on the surface. God calls out to the unreconciled outsiders, twice inviting them to peace, just as in the related oracle, Isa. 57:15–21. In Rev. 20:7–10, John witnesses the incineration that is incipient in Isa. 27:4–5, and for which Isaiah prayed in Isa. 26:11. In all three scenes, the unrepentant ones are characterized as having and exercising agency. They are free to turn over a new leaf. They are free to start over and do better, leading to acceptance, just as God admonished Cain:

If you do well, won't you be accepted? And if not, sin is crouching at the door. It wants to be your master, but you must rule over it. (Gen. 4:7)

<sup>30</sup> This is the very flexible Hebrew verb *pāqad*, which the readers of the Isaiah Apocalypse have seen in 24:21–23. It is said there that when God comes to reign in glory, God will punish/deal with/see to (*pāqad*) the hosts of heaven and the kings of the earth by throwing them together into the pit of the underworld, *and also* that 'after many days they will be punished' (*pāqad*). So attentive readers will be looking out for a narrative of the final disposition of these imprisoned ones.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Alter mentions an intriguing possibility for the meaning of the Hebrew word *bāriah*, which describes the serpent Leviathan in 27:1. Often understood to mean 'sliding', it is interpreted in the ESV as 'fleeing', by analogy to its use in Isa. 43:13. But Alter says that it is also 'the ordinary word for the bolt of a gate and so could conceivably refer to the serpent held under lock and key' (*The Hebrew Bible*, Kindle edn, p. 1823). If that is how John read it, that would connect Leviathan/the devil to the imprisonment of the heavenly host in Isa. 24:21–22 || Rev. 19:19–20:3. The *slaying* of the serpent would clearly follow the locking up of the serpent, as it does in Rev. 20:7–10.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Isa. 51:9; Job. 26:12–13.

<sup>33</sup> For the abstract fem. sg. here resuming briars and thorns (masc. pl.), cf. Isa. 30:32 and see Gesenius–Kautzsch §135p.

<sup>34</sup> Verses 4–5 are my own translation.

This time, in the glorious kingdom, the irrationally resentful ones will not be allowed to do murder. They have done wrong in their mortal lives, and when they lift their hand to do wrong again in resurrection, God subjects them to total, final incineration (Rev. 20:9–10 || Isa. 26:10–11 || Isa. 27:4; || Isa. 66:22–24).

What comment does Schreiner have about the relationship between Rev. 20:7–10 and Isa. 27:1–5? None. He mentions Isa. 27:1 together with several other OT passages in his comments on Rev. 20:2, but only to point out that calling the devil a dragon characterizes him as 'a monster' (*Revelation*, 684). He makes no narrative connection between the dragon's final demise in Isa. 27:1 and Rev. 20:10. This means that God's earnest talk with the outsiders to his beloved vineyard in Isa. 27:4–5, inviting them to reconcile with him and enjoy his protection, but warning them of fiery incineration, floats without a place in Schreiner's end-time narrative.

Let's now briefly consider Isa. 66:22–24 in relation to Rev. 20:7–10. Keep in mind that for Schreiner, Rev. 20:7–10 is a description of the resurrection of 'the rest of the dead' (20:5) in the context of the new creation, and its aftermath.

<sup>22</sup> '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.'

<sup>23</sup> From new moon to new moon,  
and from Sabbath to Sabbath,  
all flesh shall come to worship before me,  
declares the LORD.

<sup>24</sup> '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'.

Does not v. 24 seem to prophesy, in slightly different imagery, the same attempted but thwarted siege as that revealed in Rev. 20:9? Here Isaiah pictures supernatural, unstoppable fire and maggots sent from God cleaning up the slopes outside Jerusalem after God has instantly slain the would-be attackers of the New Jerusalem in the new creation (cf. Isa. 65:17–18). In Revelation, fire comes down from heaven and consumes them. In Isaiah 66 we effectively have the same picture of total fiery divine destruction of would-be besiegers, just with slightly different imagery being employed. What remark does Schreiner make on Isa. 66:22–24 in his commentary on Rev. 20:7–10? Not one word.

To summarize this section, Schreiner embraces the NCM paradigm to the extent of agreeing (1) that the thousand years of Rev. 20:1–10 begins when Jesus comes in glory, (2) that the new creation of Rev. 21:1–4 also belongs on the timeline at Christ's coming in glory, and (3) that the resurrection and fiery destruction of 'the rest of the dead' is pictured in Rev. 20:7–10. The fiery incineration of the wicked, in the context of the glorious, fully-manifested kingdom, and right outside the community of the faithful, is prophesied not only in Rev. 20:7–10, but also in Isa. 26:10–11, 27:1–5, and 66:22–24. It is striking that Schreiner does not point the readers of his commentary to any of these closely parallel passages, given the fact that all four are highly suggestive of instant, complete destruction, and none of them—including Isa. 66:24, which explicitly speaks of *corpses*—lends itself to the idea of an unending conscious punishment. Admittedly, the picture of the devil's everlasting torment in the so-called 'lake of fire' along with the beast and the false

prophet complicates this picture, but an analysis of John's way of alluding to and paralleling the imagery in Isa. 34:8–17 yields a satisfying explanation of why that particular imagery is not intended to be taken literally on its temporal axis. For example, Schreiner himself cites approvingly Thomas and Macchia's comment on the everlasting smoldering described in Rev. 19:3 (which alludes to Isa 34:10): 'The 'destruction is permanent, absolute, and irreversible'.<sup>35</sup> That is clearly the weight of the imagery of everlasting burning and smoking in both Isaiah and Revelation.<sup>36</sup>

#### **4. On Rev. 20:11–15 as the Divine Court for the Judgment of the Dead**

Schreiner is able to create a reasonable account of the narrative flow of Rev. 19:1–20:10 without talking about the closely-parallel passages in Isaiah that I regard as crucial sister prophetic passages. This leaves him free to hold to a story in which no one gets a second chance and no grace/mercy is ever shown to 'the rest of the dead'. But what will happen when he attempts to explain the relationship between Rev. 20:7–10 and 20:11–15? My version of NCM holds that Rev. 7–10 and 20:13–15 are pictures, from different angles, of the same resurrection, judgment, and second death of the resurrected unrepentant by consuming fire. Schreiner is equivocal about this. It seems that his desire to hold to a temporally literal<sup>37</sup> interpretation of the everlasting torment of the 'pool of fire' (20:10) forces him not only to delink John's visions of the end of the unrepentant from Isaiah's, but also to delink from one another the adjacent passages (20:7–10, 20:11–15) that he is commenting on. Let us see what he does.

In characterizing his 'new-creation millennialism' approach to interpreting the millennium, he writes,

*Tenth*, some might think the chronology of 20:11–15 is a problem. Here we have judgment according to works, but in context, the judgment is of the ungodly. Certainly all people are judged according to works, but the righteous have already been vindicated and are already reigning with Christ (20:4). I suggest that 20:11 pictures the new creation inaugurated at the beginning of the thousand years, and then verses 12–15 focus on the judgment of the wicked that occurs later...it is most likely here that the judgment of the ungodly is described (see Schnabel 2021: 678–79)... (*Revelation*, 681)

<sup>35</sup> *Revelation*, 628, citing J. C. Thomas and F. D. Macchia, *Revelation*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 328.

<sup>36</sup> See NCM, 46–48, and J. Webb Mealy, *The End of the Unrepentant: A Study of the Biblical Themes of Fire and Being Consumed* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 80–92. Briefly, Isa. 34:8–10 uses the image of bitumen and sulfur everlasting burning and smoking as a non-literal way of expressing the promise that Edom, a perennial enemy, will never rise to menace Israel again, when God destroys it completely. John picks up this exact language up to make the same promise in Rev. 19:3 as regards Babylon the Great, the greatest persecutor of the faithful in all human history. Similarly, the following section, Isa 34:11–17, uses a poem about everlasting idyllic conditions for desert creatures in the territory that used to be Edom, to express the same promise: this enemy nation will never rise again, because that territory will never again be inhabited by human beings. Only wilderness animals will live there. An angel in John's vision does the same thing in Rev. 18:22–24: he gives a poem about the sights and sounds of human habitation that will never again be heard in Babylon. He also uses a different non-literal illustration of the permanence of Babylon's destruction: he picks up a great millstone and throws it into the depths of the sea, and exclaims, 'Thus will Babylon the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer' (Rev. 18:21). Readers who observe this pattern have the interpretative option to understand the imagery of the everlasting sulfuric burning of the 'pool of fire' (Gr. λίμνη τοῦ πυρός) in Rev. 20:10 as expressive of the same assurance that is its function in Isa. 34:8–10 and Rev. 19:3—the devil and his two evil human helpers, who brought about the death of the whole human race, will never, ever rise again. John's explanation that the pool of fire is 'the second death' (Rev. 20:6, 14) gives added viability to this option: there is no resurrection from the second death, which is the death of the resurrected person, hence there will never again be danger from persecutors consigned to it.

<sup>37</sup> I assume that he does not take anything about the λίμνη τοῦ πυρός literally except its characterization as a condition of torment that lasts forever and ever (εἰς τοὺς αἰώνας τῶν αἰώνων).

I agree that Rev. 20:12–15 focuses on the judicial *condemnation* and *punishment* of the unrepentant, so that it provides a counterpoint to the imagery in the judgment scene of Rev. 20:4–6, which focuses on the *vindication* and *reward* of the faithful witnesses. Rev. 20:12–15 tells the negative side of the judgment story. What is out of focus here is the question of whether and in what way ‘the rest of the dead’ are judged and/or condemned and sentenced to punishment in Rev. 20:4–6. To me it is crucial that 20:4–6 be allowed to represent the judgment of all the dead that attends Christ’s coming in glory, and the handing out of rewards and punishments to all—the faithful and the unworthy alike (Rev. 2:23; 11:18; 22:12).<sup>38</sup> But in saying that ‘the judgment of the wicked occurs later’, i.e. after the thousand years, Schreiner even contradicts his own comment on Rev. 11:18:

The day of God’s wrath is also the day of judgment, when he will judge (*κριηγῆναι*, *krithēnai*; cf. 19:2). We read in 20:12 that God will judge the dead on the last day, when all the books are opened, and the same event is recorded here. The wicked are judged for their evil actions; conversely, a reward (*μισθόν*, *misthon*) is given (so also 22:12) to the righteous (cf. Isa. 40:10; 62:11). (*Revelation*, 414–15)

An important part of the appeal of NCM, as regards creating harmony within Revelation as well as in terms of broader scriptural harmony, is that it does not read Revelation 20 as arbitrarily and idiosyncratically deferring the judgment of ‘the rest of the dead’ until long after Christ’s coming. Schreiner’s view does not have this benefit.

He goes on in his next summary section:

*Eleventh*, one could object that, according to the new-creation millennial view, the wicked are raised from the dead (20:5) and then destroyed again in 20:7–10, which would necessitate a second resurrection [in 20:13–15]. But it isn’t clear that the destruction of the wicked necessitates a second resurrection. To put it another way, destruction by fire doesn’t mean that the wicked are stripped of resurrection bodies. It means that they are cast into the lake of fire. (*Revelation*, 682)

This would make great sense if Schreiner interpreted the unrepentant having a river of fire come down from heaven and devour them (Rev. 20:9) and the unrepentant being thrown (Gr. *ἐβλήθησαν*) into a pool of fire (20:14–15) as two pictures representing the same event. In that case, being resurrected, taking actions that merited being erased from God’s creation (20:8–9a), and being instantly inundated in a pool of fire sent from heaven (20:9b), would serve as a fitting fulfillment of the immediately-preceding prediction that ‘the rest of the dead’ would be subject to ‘the second death’ (20:6). After all, what is more obviously a ‘second death’ than humans who have died and have been resurrected being consumed by fire—incinerated without residue—as they stand on their feet?

Schreiner, however, wishes to avoid the idea that the resurrected unrepentant might suffer such a fate, namely, annihilation, complete removal from existence. In his comments on Rev. 20:8 he writes,

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<sup>38</sup> This belief is solidly attested elsewhere in the NT: see Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 4:5; Matt. 16:27; 25:31–46; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 14:9–12; 1 Cor. 4:4–5; 2 Cor. 5:10. For the outcome of this judgment as resurrection for the faithful, implying *refusal* of resurrection to the unfaithful, see Luke 14:13–14; 20:35; Phil. 3:11 (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23, which speaks of a selective resurrection, but bases it on belonging to Christ).

One objection to this reading [seeing Gog and Magog as the resurrected 'rest of the dead'] is that 20:11–15 indicates that the dead are resurrected for judgment and not for the purpose of engaging in the final battle (C. Koester 2014: 777), but the judgment of 20:11–15 takes place after the second rebellion, and thus this objection isn't decisive. (*Revelation*, 696)

Separating the fiery destruction of the rest of the dead in Rev. 20:9b from their being condemned to the second death in the pool of fire in 20:14–15 is going to create serious coherence problems for the narrative. What are we supposed to imagine here? That the rest of the dead, granted resurrection, will rebel and be burned to a crisp, but will still miraculously remain alive, *and then* be dragged before the judgment seat of God to be formally judged and condemned for their actions in resurrection—or even their actions in mortal life—*and then* be thrown, crispy as they are, into a permanent fiery reservoir, a *lake* of fire? If they were scheduled to be judged, condemned, and thrown into a lake of fire for their sins in mortal life, why were they not dragged out of Hades and caused to stand in chains before the bar of God's judgment, rather than being allowed to run riot in the new creation, as though they had made a prison break? Alternatively, if their being thrown into a lake of fire is to be understood as a consequence of their misbehavior in resurrection, how can one possibly avoid identifying the all-consuming fire from heaven of 20:9 with the inundating pool of supernatural fire of 20:14–15? Schreiner's commentary is creating problem after problem. Let us look at some more comments.

A great white throne is set up, and the fleeing and displacement of earth and heaven signal that the old creation has passed away and that the new creation has dawned. The dead stand before God's throne, and the courtroom is in session with the opening of the books, including the book of life. The dead are judged according to their works. Verse 13 seems extraneous since the dead have already been judged, but the best way to handle this is probably by acknowledging that we have a recapitulation of verse 12 in verse 13. The final judgment is presented from another perspective. (*Revelation*, 699)

First, it is not correct to say that 'a great white throne is set up'. John sees a great white (or shining, Gr. λευκός—see *BAGD* definition ① and LSJ first definition) throne. He does not see it set up. And saying that it is 'set up' obscures the fact that John wants his more astute readers to come to the realization that God's great, shining throne is none other than *the New Jerusalem itself*.<sup>39</sup> Being resurrected and surrounding the glory-shining New Jerusalem in the new creation (Rev. 20:9a || Isa. 66:22–24), and being resurrected to stand before God's great white/shining throne (Rev. 20:13), are not two different things. They are two different ways of describing the same last encounter between God and the hardened rebels—just as there is but one outcome revealed in two different ways (Rev. 20:14–15 || Rev. 20:9b).<sup>40</sup> It is no coincidence that John says in Rev. 20:15 that everyone whose name was not written in the Book of Life was cast into the pool of fire—because the Book of Life is to be understood as the citizen-rolls of the New Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup> It is all

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Rev. 21:9–11 || Rev. 4:2–3; cf. Jer. 3:17; *1 En.* 18:6–9; 21:1–25:5; Rev. 22:1–5. On this, see ATY, 173–77; NCM, 42–43. On God as the φωτύρης, the light source, that causes the New Jerusalem to shine, see p. 6 and nt. 25 above.

<sup>40</sup> R. Bauckham states what is now generally agreed: 'The juxtaposition of more than one image with a single referent is a characteristic of John's visions' ('The Figurae of John of Patmos', in *Prophecy and Millenarianism: Essays in Honour of Marjorie Reeves*, ed. by A. Williams [Harlow, UK: Longman, 1980], 109–25 [111]).

<sup>41</sup> So H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 269, followed by, e.g., L. Baynes, *The Heavenly Book Motif in Judeo-Christian Apocalypses 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.*, JSJSup 152 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 164–67; C. R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 791. After all, John says in Rev. 21:27, 'But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are

of unrepentant humanity, all of those who have been rejected for citizenship in the New Jerusalem, who stand in front of it, are evaluated according to their behavior, and are thrown into the pool of fire, the second death. They intended to bring the second death—the death of the resurrected ones—on the inhabitants of the Beloved City, but the faithful, protected by God's own saving power, strong as walls made of solid jasper, are not vulnerable to it (Rev. 20:6; cf. 21:18; Isa. 26:1–4).

Secondly, as Schreiner acknowledges elsewhere, grammatically speaking, there is probably no narration of the fleeing of earth and heaven in Rev. 20:11. Rather, the One whom John sees on the throne is 'he from whom earth and heaven fled'—back in 6:14, in the sixth seal vision, and in 16:18–21, in the seventh bowl vision.<sup>42</sup> This means that the scene John is about to see in vv. 12–15 is not firmly tethered to the narrative timeline. John may see something that happens in association with the dissolution of the present creation at Christ's coming in glory with the Father, or he may see something that happens a thousand years later, or both. Its temporal placement will have to be discerned based on the logic of what John sees in the scene.

According to my preferred reading of this passage, John sees, in v. 12, the dead being judged at Christ's and the Father's parousia (cf. Rev. 11:18) while in Hades, the underworld realm of the dead. The surface of the earth has been stripped away above them, so that, exactly like the unrepentant living on earth in 6:14–17, above whom the cover of the heavens had been ripped away, the unrepentant dead stand exposed in Hades and accountable to their creator.<sup>43</sup> Then, in v. 13, John sees them drawn out of the realms of the dead and judged, this time not by the records of past deeds, but by their actions in resurrection. Rev. 20:11–15 is thus best read as a condensed vision, in courtroom imagery, of the same sequence John saw in Rev. 20:4–10, rather than the transition between vv. 12–13 being an awkward instance of recapitulation.<sup>44</sup>

Commenting on Rev. 20:13, Schreiner says,

Both the wicked and the righteous will be assessed and rewarded accordingly, though the argument made here is that the wicked are judged at a later time than the righteous. That the last judgment is in accord with works is affirmed elsewhere in Revelation (2:23; 20:12)... (*Revelation*, 703)

Both believers and unbelievers are judged according to works, but in this context only unbelievers are judged. The righteous were raised and vindicated when the new creation was inaugurated, at the beginning of the thousand years (Rev. 20:4). (*Revelation*, 704)

I agree with Schreiner that the focus of John's vision in Rev. 20:12–15 is on the judgment of 'the rest of the dead'. But there are two issues with the above statements. First, it is not simply the 'last' judgment that is said to be according to works in Revelation; it is the judgment that happens when Jesus comes in glory as judge of the living and the dead. As Jesus says in Rev. 22:12, 'I am coming

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written in the Lamb's Book of Life'. Only the holy redeemed ones, the citizens of the Beloved City, are allowed to enter it. And indeed, since the whole City is God's temple and God is its temple, they will never leave (cf. Rev. 21:22; 3:12; 7:15).

<sup>42</sup> See *Revelation*, 700, and 681 and n. 31 on that page, and the technical grammatical argument in *ATY*, 162–67.

<sup>43</sup> In this context, their 'standing' does not refer to resurrection, but to metaphorically standing in the dock while the books containing the records of their deeds in mortal life are read out. Schreiner agrees: 'the verb can designate those who stand before a judge to have their case assessed (cf. Acts 24:10; 26:6)' (*Revelation*, 702).

<sup>44</sup> *Contra* Schreiner, *Revelation*, 702. Many commentators fail even to remark on the apparent doubling of the judgment. Note, in contrast, the reaction of R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, ICC, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), II, 194–95, who found the relationship between vv. 12 and 13 so strange that he was convinced the text had to be corrupt.

soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done'.<sup>45</sup> Secondly, to say that 'the righteous were raised and vindicated' gets the order backwards. It was the vindication—i.e. the positive verdict—that they received in the court of God's judgment in Rev. 20:4 (|| 11:18) that led to their reward of being resurrected to reign with Christ in his glorious kingdom for the thousand years and beyond (cf. Luke 20:36; Phil. 3:11).

Commenting on Rev. 20:14, Schreiner says,

The cessation of the present creation, the old order of the world, is punctuated by Death and Hades being thrown (*ἐβλήθησαν*, *eblēthēsan*) into the lake of fire...In the new creation, 'death will be no more' (Rev. 21:4). (*Revelation*, 704)

This does not seem to match his view that the new creation takes place at Christ's coming, not after the thousand years. This material looks like it was written under an amillennial paradigm and never edited to fit within the new creation millennialism paradigm to which he came late in the writing process. He goes on:

The consummated reign of God and Christ (11:15) means that the rule of Death and Hades has ended. John then explains that the second death (*ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος*, *ho thanatos ho deuteros*) is the lake of fire (2:11; 21:8). The first death is physical death; the second death is everlasting separation from God in which people are tormented and have no rest forever (14:9–11)... Death no longer touches those who belong to God and to the Lamb, those who enjoy the first resurrection (20:6), but those who are aligned with the beast and the dragon will suffer a death that never ceases, as the next verse [20:15] clarifies. Death, as the last enemy for those who belong to Christ, comes to an end (1 Cor. 15:54–55). (*Revelation*, 704, commenting on Rev. 20:14)

There are several problems with this material.

1. When Schreiner speaks of the announcement of Christ's coming in glory (in the seventh trumpet vision, Rev. 11:15) as inaugurating 'the consummated reign of God and Christ', this again appears to come out of an amillennial, rather than a new creation millennial, paradigm.
2. Schreiner gets the relationship between the lake/pool of fire and the second death backwards. John explains that the lake of fire is the second death; he *does not* explain the second death is the lake of fire: 'And Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire' (*καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἐβλήθησαν εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός. οὗτος ὁ θάνατος ὁ δευτερος ἐστιν, ἡ λίμνη τοὺ πυρός*).<sup>46</sup>
3. When Schreiner defines the second death as 'everlasting separation from God in which people are tormented and have no rest forever (14:9–11)', he not only drags in a popular Christian notion that has no foundation in Revelation or anywhere else in the Bible (at least on a premillennial scheme),<sup>47</sup> i.e. hell as 'eternal separation', but he also tries to support it

<sup>45</sup> Cf. also the other clear NT affirmations that all will be judged when Jesus comes in glory in nt. 22 above.

<sup>46</sup> For John's formula for giving an interpretation of something he sees using a relative or demonstrative pronoun and the verb to be, see Rev. 4:5; 5:6; 7:14; 11:4; 14:4; 17:15, 18; 20:2, 5, 12, 14; 21:8(!), 12(?), 17.

<sup>47</sup> In my view, Paul's quotation in 2 Thess. 1:9 of a snippet from the confrontation scene between God and the wicked in Isa. 2:10–22 provides not even a thin thread upon which to hang a doctrine of 'eternal separation'—especially for a premillennialist, who would attach it to the Battle of Har Magedon (see the equivalent scene in Rev. 6:12–17), not to the final fate of the wicked. Similarly for statements like 'Depart from me, you workers of iniquity' (Matt. 7:21–3; 25:10–12, 41; Luke 13:25–7).

with a citation of a passage in which the torment of the punished ones is *explicitly in the presence of the holy angels and Christ, the divine Lamb* (14:10).

- When Schreiner says, 'those who are aligned with the beast and the dragon will suffer a death that never ceases, as the next verse clarifies', he claims more than the evidence can support. Schreiner interpreted the scene of Rev. 20:7–10 as the resurrection, misbehavior, and incineration of the resurrected 'rest of the dead', who, as John had just implied in 20:6, would be vulnerable to the power of 'the second death', the death of the resurrected person. The most immediate and natural interpretation of this incineration in consuming fire, immediately following mention of a second death, is extinction, obliteration, annihilation. Such would be an utterly final and irrevocable death, unlike the first death, which God in Christ saw fit to reverse for all, even the unrepentant.<sup>48</sup> The fact that the lake/pool of fire is pictured as a place where the devil and the beast and the false prophet suffer endlessly, and all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life are cast into it (20:15), at most *raises the question* of whether ordinary human beings might somehow subsist there endlessly—it does not 'clarify' it, as though ruling out the annihilation interpretation, which has its own force. Even Rev. 14:10–11 only leaves 'the smoke of their torment' arising endlessly, as does the smoke of Babylon the Great's total, and irrevocable, destruction, which leaves a land forever without inhabitants (Rev. 19:3 || Isa. 34:8–10; cf. 18:21–23 || Isa. 34:8–17).

It is telling that Schreiner does not even mention Rev. 20:9, which shows the instant incineration of 'Gog and Magog', the resurrected unrepentant, in his comments on Rev. 20:14–15. He does not explain how the final fate of the resurrected unrepentant in 'the second death' in 20:7–10 relates to their final fate in 'the second death' in 20:14–15. The link—any link, including one that might explain how they are to be imagined as suffering two fiery destructions, as Schreiner's exposition appears to imply<sup>49</sup>—is missing.

### 5. Conclusion: *In for a Penny, Not for a Pound*

Schreiner tries, according to his lights, to 'eat the fish and spit out the bones' of the new creation millennialism paradigm in his Revelation commentary. To him, the bones, the inedible part, is seeing any divine grace or opportunity for repentance being shown to the resurrected 'rest of the dead', and the final fate of the stubbornly unrepentant being seen as annihilation, rather than literal everlasting torment. But in my view, he eats the bones and spits out the fish, resulting in a disconnected, and at several points incoherent, explanation of Revelation 20. A new creation millennialist reading of Revelation 20, especially when one pays consistent attention to the intimate relationship between Rev. 19:11–20:15 and its sister prophecy, Isa. 24:1–27:5, creates a story that not only hangs together and makes sense as a narrative in a way unmatched by any other interpretative approach, but also yields a theological beauty for which every Christian of good heart must surely yearn. If many believers yearn, wishing that even the stubbornest of their non-believing loved ones might be given at least the chance to turn from their ways and live at the final judgment, whether they take that chance or not, how much more does God, whose chief character traits are compassion (Heb. *rahûm*), mercy (*hannûn*), patience (*'erek-appîm*), and great love (*rabhesed*)? Not only does God proclaim these as his core characteristics to Moses, messenger of the Sinai covenant (Exod. 34:6–7), but the psalmist celebrates the fact that these attributes reveal

<sup>48</sup> See John 5:21–29; 1 Cor. 15:21–22.

<sup>49</sup> *Revelation*, 696, commenting on 20:8.

God's orientation towards 'all he has made' (Ps. 145:8–9). It is thus absolutely in character for God to offer room for repentance even at the very last judgment, before turning out the lights on those who simply refuse to hear the loving invitation: 'Peace, peace, to the near and to the far, and I will heal them' (Isa. 57:20–21 || Isa. 27:4–5).

### ***Appendix: Correction of Schreiner's Mischaracterization of my View of Ezekiel 38–39***

In his comments on Rev. 20:8, Schreiner critiques my view of the relationship between Rev. 20:7–10 and Ezekiel 38–39 in the following words:

It is strained for Mealy to see Ezek. 39 as depicting the second battle and Ezek. 38 as the first (see his more recent defense: Mealy 2019 [*sic*; read 2014]: 142–47). Such a reversal of order by John in Revelation is quite unlikely... Mealy's new-creation millennialism doesn't rest on his reading of Ezekiel.<sup>50</sup>

There is no basis in *After the Thousand Years*, 'Revelation is One', or *New Creation Millennialism* for the claim that I think the battle in Ezekiel 39 is 'the second battle', either in the sense of coming after the (incipient but not narrated) battle of Ezek. 38:1–17 in Ezekiel's narrative world, or in the sense of being parallel to Rev. 20:7–10 as opposed to being parallel to Rev. 19:17–21. I argue extensively in all three of these works that John would have his readers understand that Ezek. 38:1–17, with its thrice repeated refrain, 'living securely' (*yāšab lābətah* vv. 8, 11, 14), is a revelation of the conditions under which the faithful live during and after the millennium, and thus it is an oracle of the resurrection and last temptation (38:10–11 || Rev. 20:8) of the unrepentant. Ezekiel 39 (or 38:18–39:29) thus narrates the famous battle at the end of this age that will remove the occupying enemies from the promised land, signal the return of the exiles, and make room for the glorious divine/messianic kingdom that is prophesied by many prophets of the OT (see Ezek. 38:17). The context of that battle is *not* Israel living securely at the navel of the earth, as in Ezek. 38:8–12, but rather Israel living in exile under God's punishment and international scorn (Ezek. 39:7, 23–28). I believe John sees two battles in Ezekiel 38–39: the one, which is only presaged, or hinted, in 38:1–17, comes in the context of the glorious messianic reign of Ezekiel 37, and thus parallels Rev. 20:7–10. The other—second in textual order but first both in Ezekiel's and John's narrative worlds—comes in the context of God's reclamation of the exiles from all the nations, thus paralleling Rev. 19:17–21 (cf. Rev. 11:1–2). What is going on in Ezekiel 38:1–17 and 38:18–39:29 is not a presentation of one battle, nor is it really a presentation of two battles in reverse chronological order. Rather, Ezek. 38:1–16 follows on seamlessly in the same context as that of chapter 37,<sup>51</sup> namely, that of the glorious and everlasting messianic kingdom. Then God says, rather cryptically, to Gog, in 38:17, 'Are you, the one who will try to attack my people in the glorious messianic kingdom, the same enemy that former prophets used to prophesy about in the old days?' By asking Gog who he is, God puts a puzzle before the readers, whose solution will only be revealed in Revelation in the NT. How can this be—that the same enemies wiped out at the establishment of God's (and Messiah's) glorious kingdom could be drawn by God to appear *again* after the glorious kingdom has been established and the community of the faithful has been living in peace and security for an indefinite period? The answer is, *by resurrection*. I think John would have us understand that Gog and Magog are—or, more accurately, they include—all the kings of the earth and the armies that fought at the Battle of Har Magedon to keep Jesus from claiming the earth, and who were then slain in the classic battle prophesied by many prophets, in which YHWH of Hosts would triumph,<sup>52</sup> and take up his glorious reign in the New Jerusalem, the 'beloved city' (Rev. 20:9). They will appear again, because God will resurrect them after the

<sup>50</sup> *Revelation*, 695–96, citing NCM, 142–47.

<sup>51</sup> Keep in mind that chapter divisions are late additions, not part of the original composition.

<sup>52</sup> Rev. 19:19–21 || Isa. 13:1–14:2; 34:2–8; Joel 3:9–21; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 14:1–15; etc.

thousand years and show them the glories that have been bestowed on the faithful.<sup>53</sup> Their response to this experience (envy, covetousness, self-deception, attempted violence) will be the basis of their final judgment. Hence Ezekiel 39 is not exactly 'in reverse order' with Ezekiel 38. Rather, it recapitulates the moment of God's saving the exiles of Israel from among the nations in chs. 36–37. The multiple verbal and thematic ties between these chapters give strong evidence for this.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Paul refers to God's intention to show the glory with which he has clothed those who are reconciled to him to those ultimately destined for destruction: 'What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory...?' (Rom. 9:22–23). It is as though God is unwilling to let any of his created ones go to final perdition without first showing them exactly what glorious blessings they are throwing away. They also need to know that the harms they perpetrated did not prevail, that their envy and hate did not keep any of the faithful from experiencing 'a surpassing weight of glory' (2 Cor. 4:17 || Rom. 8:18).

<sup>54</sup> For example: Israel 'will know that I am the LORD' (36:11 || 39:22, 28). God will act to protect his name from being profaned (36:20–23 || 39:7). The people of Israel went into exile because of their sins (36:17–19 || 39:23–24). God will restore the fortunes of Israel (36:36–38 || 39:25). God will give the Spirit to Israel (36:26–27; 37:14 || 39:29). 'I have spoken!' (36:36 || 39:5, cf. 39:7). 'I will do it'/'I have done it' (36:22, 27, 32, 36; 37:14, 22 || 39:21, 24). 'The House of Israel' (36:10, 17, 21, 22, 32, 37; 37:11, 16 || 39:12, 22, 23, 25, 29). Israel's 'iniquity' (36:31, 33 || 39:23). Israel's 'shame' (36:31–32 || 39:26). Not one of these terms and themes appears in Ezek. 38. For a fuller argument, see Mealy, 'Revelation is One', 142–47.