

HARMONIZING EZEKIEL AND REVELATION

Ezekiel 37-48 and Revelation 20-22 are arguably among the most difficult scriptures for students of the Bible to understand. This difficulty can turn to frustration and disappointment considering that both passages are eschatological, and since everyone wants to understand end-time prophecy. These two passages are the only places in the Bible that mention “Gog and Magog” together, a peoples whose identity has long been disputed. A few years ago a question came to my mind: could these two passages be related? If so, could one be used to help understand the other, and vice versa? So I decided to try to harmonize them and see what I could discover. Below are parallel vertical columns representing the main themes of Ezekiel 37-40 and Revelation 20-22.

Ezekiel	Revelation
not mentioned	binding of Satan (20:1-3)
valley of dry bones (37)	thousand years (20:4-6)
Gog and Magog (38,39)	Gog and Magog (20:7-10)
not mentioned	judgment (20:11-15)
wall, temple, river, trees, city (40-48)	new heaven and earth (21,22)

At first glance this chart probably appears to the reader as quite inconcise, even imperfect. What about the gaps? Well, anyone who has ever studied the synoptic gospels has surely noticed gaps among the three authors, but when combined they fill in the full story. So the gaps between Ezekiel and Revelation need not be consequential to our understanding. As you can see, the above chart contains five overall themes. Ezekiel does not mention the binding of Satan. I have posted a three-part series of articles asking “What did Jesus Accomplish?” Part I is titled: “Triumphed over Satan.” You may wish to pause and read this article before going further. I would also recommend that you look up what others have written about the binding of Satan. Suffice it to say that the scriptures show Satan was “bound” two thousand years ago at the cross.

Next you can see that I have paralleled Ezekiel’s valley of the dry bones with the thousand years of Revelation. What I believe is key here is the statement, “This is the **first** resurrection” (Rev. 20:5,6). Did you also notice the term “second death”? To me this begs the question: Then what is the **first** death? Many might quickly respond by quoting Hebrews, which says, “...It is appointed to men once to die...” (Heb. 9:27). This is a reference to the physical death common to all human beings. But is it the first death? Most often the Bible refers to physical death euphemistically as a type of **sleep**, where the saints rest in their graves.

Jesus told the Sadducees that God considers the patriarchs to still be alive to Him (Lk. 20:37,38). So, physical death is not the first death. If you have not yet read my article titled “What is the First Death?” please pause to do so. It shows from the scriptures that the first death is a spiritual death to God. All have sinned and the penalty is spiritual darkness and death. When anyone in this condition turns to God in repentance and faith, accepting the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, he is brought to life through the regenerating Holy Spirit. He has “passed from [the first] death to life” (I Jn. 3:14; Jn. 5:24,25). The scriptures further describe this transformation as no less than a resurrection from the

dead, “Even when you were **dead** in sins, [God] has quickened [made alive] us together with Christ... and has **raised us up** [resurrected] together...” (Eph. 2:5,6).

So the first resurrection is shown to be the one all Christians have experienced since that day of Pentecost when the regenerating Holy Spirit began to bring the dead to life! The first resurrection has been ongoing for nearly two thousand years. This is what Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones was foretelling. He prophesied, “Behold, O my people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves...I will put my **Spirit** in you, and you shall **live**...” (Ezek. 37:12-14).

These people are called the “whole house of Israel” because they are the prophesied “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), the metaphorical “twelve tribes” (Acts 26:7, Jas. 1:1), the “hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of [spiritual] Israel” (Rev. 7:4; 14:1)—the church, the collection of the saints throughout the ages!

Pre-millennialists view Revelation 20:4-6 very differently. They believe that following Jesus’ return, the saints will be made immortal after having been martyred by an end-time beast. They see them as judges, sitting on thrones reigning over mortals as kings and priests with Christ for a literal thousand years. By my estimation, this takes a very dim view of how God sees His children today and in the past. Jesus said, “Judge with righteous judgment” (Jn. 7:24). The apostle Paul wrote, “But he who is spiritual judges all things...” (I Cor. 2:15); and, “Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?” (I Cor. 6:2). It is the world which teaches people not to judge, even the most evil and immoral behavior. But throughout the scriptures Christians are admonished to judge—discernment between good and evil. Yes, judgment is not confined to some future millennial age.

What about being kings and priests? The apostle Peter wrote, “But you are [now]...a royal [kingly] priesthood...” (I Pet. 2:9). As to reigning, Paul wrote, “...Those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will **reign** in life through the one, Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17). What do Christians reign over? God told the first murderer, Cain, “...And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you **may rule** over it” (Gen. 4:7). But sadly Cain and all who have followed have let “**sin** reign to death” (Rom. 5:21). Paul went on to admonish Christians not to let sin “reign” (6:12-14). Yes, it is each person’s choice as to which will reign—sin or you. As God said, we “**may** [not shall] rule [reign] over it [sin].”

What does the term “thousand years” mean? It is of the utmost importance that when studying Revelation one recognize that nearly the entire book is **symbolic**, filled with imagery and metaphors. Very little, if any, should be taken literally. “Thousand years” is a symbol, but for what? In the generic sense, what is the significance of the number 1,000? It is not a small number, but a **large** one. If we say something happened 1,000 years ago, we know it happened a **long time** ago. When God said the church age would last a “thousand years,” He meant for us to understand that it would last for a long time. Christians were to conclude that Jesus was not returning for a very long time, and so he has not.

In summary, Ezekiel 37 describes Christians who have gone from spiritual death to spiritual life through the regenerating Holy Spirit. Revelation 20:4-6 describe the saints throughout the church age judging and reigning over sin as priests and kings.

Now we come to “Gog and Magog.” Who were/are they? Surprisingly, it does not really matter, because they are symbolic, not literal. Whatever Jews of the 6th century B.C. thought of Gog and Magog, they knew Ezekiel’s vision would be fulfilled “in the latter [end-time] years” (Ezek. 38:8).

Revelation shows that time to be at the end of the thousand years—church age. This war will be precipitated when “Satan [is] released from his prison” (Rev. 20:7,8). Notice, Gog and Magog are only a symbol for “the nations which are in the four corners of the earth”—peoples from all over the earth.

The key here is understanding who symbolic Gog and Magog try to attack. In Ezekiel, Gog and Magog say, “...‘I will go up against a land of **unwalled** villages; I will go to a **peaceful** people, who dwell **safely**...’” (Ezek. 38:11). Revelation says Gog and Magog will “surround the **camp** of the **saints** and the **beloved city**” (Rev. 20:9). It should be obvious who these people are. These people have the spirit of peace, and live under the spiritual protection of God. They are the saints, Christians, depicted as camping spiritually as strangers and pilgrims. Collectively they are the beloved city—“the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). This hardly describes the modern Jewish state of Israel—whose capital, Jerusalem, God labels as “Sodom and Egypt” (Rev. 11:8)—even though many of today’s pop eschatologists teach that it does.

There can be no doubt, these are Christians in the end-time who will be threatened with holocaust. The war of Gog and Magog is none other than the prophesied “Great Tribulation,” which will be precipitated by Satan upon his “release from his prison.” This is the Devil’s “final solution,” the annihilation of all spiritual Jews! But both he and Gog and Magog will come to their end.

Our harmony has brought us to the Judgment, about which Ezekiel is silent. Revelation 20:5 says, “But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished....” This is the second (general) resurrection, when all those who have lived and died without ever having known God—the vast majority of mankind—will be brought back to physical life. This will be a **first** and not a second chance to be saved. These people will be given a choice—for the first time and without the Devil’s deceptive influence—of whether or not to respond to God’s call.

This is the time Jesus spoke of when he said, “All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25:31-46). Despite what many have taught and believed, God is not going to tell billions of spiritually ignorant people, “Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire...” (v41). Why? Because “the Lord is not...willing that any should perish [eternally] but that all should come to repentance” (II Pet. 3:9). God will probably say something like this to these people, “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that...you... may live” (Deut. 30:19). Hopefully, most will choose to live eternally with God. Beyond this, the scriptures are silent as to the nature of how this judgment will take place, and it is a mystery only God knows.

Let’s now look at the last theme of our harmony. Ezekiel 40-48 describe a wall (40:5, 42:20), temple (41:1), river (47:1-9), healing trees (47:12), and a city (48:15). Revelation 21,22 also describe a wall (21:12-14,17-20), temple (21:20), river (22:1), healing trees (22:2) , and a city (21:2,10,23-27). Could this be mere coincidence?

Let’s ask, what age is this? At this point, Jesus has returned. The saints are immortal spirits. All mankind has been judged. All peoples have either joined the saints as immortal spirits or have perished in a figurative lake of fire. There is no heaven and earth. There is no physical universe. There is **nothing** physical, including time and space. So none of what Ezekiel and Revelation describe is literal or physical. Both are describing a future spirit existence that can only be hinted at in human terms. Ezekiel describes paradise in terms Jews could relate to. Revelation describes the **same** paradise in

words Christians could relate to. Both accounts try to portray through symbolism, imagery, and metaphor the glorious future eternal reward for all Christians.