

A Short Study of Revelation 20's 1,000 Years, Part 1

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Editor's Note: This article is the first in a two part study, meant to outline the key elements of Revelation 20. A more comprehensive study will follow in [Part 2](#) of the series.

Students of Bible prophecy generally ascribe to four basic views regarding the 1,000 years mentioned in [Revelation 20](#). There are also variations within each view. They are:

1. Premillennialism
2. Postmillennialism
3. Amillennialism
4. Panmillennialism

The most popular of the four views is called Premillennialism because adherents of this view believe that Christ's kingdom on Earth will be established *before* the millennium begins. In essence, premillennialism teaches that Jesus will return to Earth, resurrect His people, and reign for 1,000 years in peace and righteousness from the throne of David in a rebuilt city of Jerusalem.

At the end of the 1,000 years, there will be a final resurrection, judgment and renewal of the heavens and the earth. Then Christ's kingdom will be consolidated with the eternal kingdom and He will return the kingdom of Earth back to the Father.

Many premillennialists believe that the promises and covenants God gave to ancient Israel in the Old Testament are unconditional; therefore, He will literally fulfill all He initially promised to Israel during the 1,000 years.

There is some dispute among premillennialists concerning the identity and role of the saints during the millennium. Some scholars teach that the saints will rule as priests and kings with Christ over the unconverted.

Others believe the Jews will be converted to Christianity as a result of the rapture and then will rule over the Gentiles. The net effect in either case is that the saints will rule over the wicked.

The opposite of Premillennialism is Postmillennialism. Bible students who believe in Postmillennialism teach that Christ's kingdom will be established on Earth *after* the 1,000 years are over.

One group of postmillennialists believe that the world will continue as it is, getting more and more Christianized as a result of Christians sharing the gospel on a wider scale (i.e., worldwide TV, shortwave radio, Bibles printed in many languages, etc). When the world is completely converted, then a long period of peace and prosperity will exist for the next 1,000 years.

At the end of the 1,000 years, Christ will return to Earth, resurrect the dead, perform the final judgment, give the saints eternal life and destroy the wicked. Another group of postmillennialists believe that until Christ establishes His kingdom at the end of the 1,000 years, the Earth is desolate of mankind during the 1,000 years.

The third view of the 1,000 years is called Amillennialism. Adherents of this view maintain that the 1,000 years is not a *literal* period of peace and righteousness. Some of them believe that the millennium alludes to a present reign of deceased souls with Christ in Heaven.

This would then be followed by Christ's second coming, a resurrection, final judgment, and Christ's eternal reign over a perfect kingdom here on Earth. Just what takes place during the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 is a matter of debate among amillennialists.

Basically, amillennialism stands in opposition to the first two options: pre and post millennialism. The millennium, according to amillennialism, is better understood in an allegorical sense.

Last, there is a catchall position on the millennium called "Panmillennialism." People in this category are not comfortable with the three views above, but they believe that in due course, the millennium will "panout" just as God intends. Obviously, this view is no view.

Which view of the millennium is best? Which view is more comprehensive? What is the truth about the 1,000 years of Revelation 20? Do Christians *really* need to know about the millennium right now? Certainly, the subject of the millennium years invites several questions.

Here is a baker s dozen for your consideration:

1. *Where are the saints during the 1,000 years?*
2. *Where are the wicked during the 1,000 years?*
3. *What are the saints and wicked doing during the 1,000 years?*
4. *Did God specifically predecree a precise period of 1,000 Earth-years or should this time period be interpreted as a general statement? (See Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8.)*
5. *Should the 1,000 years be reckoned as literal time or should this time period be calculated as 360,000 (360 x 1,000) years using the day/year principle?*
6. *Does the millennium occur before or after Christ sets up His kingdom on Earth?*
7. *How does the 1,000 years relate to other parts of Revelation's story?*
8. *What event marks the beginning of 1,000 years?*
9. *What event marks the end of the 1,000 years?*
10. *Will the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 be the seventh millennium since sin began, in effect, a Sabbath rest for Earth?*
11. *What is God's overall purpose for the 1,000 years?*
12. *Even though the 1,000 years are mentioned only in Revelation 20, do other Bible writers indirectly speak of this time period?*
13. *What will the devil and his angels be doing during the millennium?*

A Completed Picture

It is human nature to dismiss the importance of things we do not understand. An elderly man once said to me, "I've lived 80 years without understanding the millennium. Do you really think I need to know about it *now*?" I smiled and responded, "People have lived on Earth for thousands of years without refrigerators. Do we really need them *now*?"

The point behind my tongue-in-cheek response is that God has included "timely" information in the Bible; that is, when the right time comes, the information becomes essential to those who want to understand the ways of God. The better we understand God's actions, the deeper our faith in God can grow!

Therefore, I find the subject of the millennium important *right now* because the time has come. Information revealed in Revelation 20 will bring the big picture into sharper focus. In other words, the millennium and its intricate details reveals *how* God is going to deal with seven groups of people. (More about these groups will follow.)

Conclusions are Built on Basic Extensions

Every presentation on the millennium is based on suppositions or axioms that the expositor believes to be true. For example, the views of Hal Lindsey and Jack Van Impe align with their basic doctrinal beliefs. So do mine. In fact, I have read the conclusions of several expositors on the millennium and have discovered that all of them have one point in common: The millennium serves as a means to a glorious end. Each expositor believes the millennium to be a vehicle through which God terminates the sin problem.

Obviously, any expositor's conclusion is related to what they understand the sin problem to be and this is why there are significant differences on the subject.

My understanding of the millennium aligns with five essential Biblical doctrines that I hold to be true. One of these five basic doctrines is the *mortality* of man's soul. In Ezekiel we find that the soul that sins, dies. (Ezekiel 18:4) Many Christians believe the soul is immortal and that it goes to Heaven or Hell at the time of death.

However, my conclusions, based on Scripture, indicate that this is not the case. In fact, when the subject of death is correctly understood, the subject of the millennium becomes understandable. And more importantly, Revelation 20 explains how God finally and fairly terminates the sin problem.

Thus, the big picture of God's PLAN to save man is completed with the closing chapters of Revelation. For me, the subject of the millennium reveals a loving and thoughtful God!

A Word about Soul Sleep

The New Testament refers to death as "sleep" 13 times. Remember the story of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha? Jesus referred to Lazarus' death as sleep. (See John 11.) Why did Jesus say that Lazarus was asleep? Why is death called sleep so many times in the Bible?

Here is the answer: The death experience is *temporary*, just like sleep is temporary (and the older I get, the more temporary sleep seems to be). That is the reason for a “resurrection.” Every person that dies, shall live again, and these people will be awakened from their death/sleep in a resurrection.

There are two general resurrections — one for the saints, the other for the wicked. The saints will be resurrected at the Second Coming. (1 Thessalonians 4:16) The people judged to be wicked will be resurrected at the end of the millennium. (Revelation 20:5)

If you are a new *Day Star* reader, here is some background information about soulsleep that might be helpful. (I have written earlier articles on this subject.) The Lord commanded Adam that he should not eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree. **“If you do”, the Lord said, “you will be executed on that very day because of your rebellion.”** (Genesis 2:17)

In the Garden, there was only *one* death possible for those who had access to the Tree of Life. Death could only come through execution. (The wage for sin is eternal death. Romans 6:23)

The day Adam sinned, he was to be executed for his rebellion against God, but Jesus stepped “in the way” and became man’s mediator or intercessor. At that very moment, man’s *penalty* for sin (execution and eternal death) was averted because a Savior stepped in the way.

To prevent sinners from living forever, man was removed from the Garden so he would not have access to the Tree of Life. (Genesis 3:22) Without the renewing power found in the fruit on the Tree of Life, a *temporary* death (first death) became part of man’s experience. Even though the PLAN of salvation delayed the administration of eternal death, it did not stop the relentless process of sin’s degeneracy. The first death — a temporary death — is the consequence of sin’s degeneracy.

For example, Adam lived 930 years and then died. Adam received a “stay of execution” (as all mankind has) for the sin he committed until the end of the millennium. This final death-by-execution is the second death. Of course, if Adam received Christ as his Savior (and I believe he did), He will not have to die the second death because Jesus died that death for him (paid the price for sin).

Jesus was *executed* just as the second death requires. But, and this is the point, although execution and eternal death has been delayed for mankind, it will certainly be implemented. The second death (the eternal death) comes at the end of the millennium when the justice of God is poured out on people who He determines are in rebellion against Him and the principles of His kingdom.

Am I saying that the wicked are going to be resurrected from their temporary death at the end of the millennium, only to be executed for their wickedness at the second death? Yes. Why would God treat the wicked this way? Why would He resurrect wicked people only to destroy them? Doesn’t this sound mean? On the surface, it does. But, as this study continues, you will learn the simple and profound answer to why God chose to handle matters in this way.

A 7,000 Year Plan

As stated in previous studies, the PLAN of salvation seems to take 7,000 years to accomplish. God designed this plan as a simple but elegant process for dealing with mankind. In short, it works this way: By staying Adam and Eve's execution, God allowed them to live, procreate and populate the Earth as originally PLANNED.

But since sin ruined mankind, mankind was allowed to live for only a season. At the end of each person's life, he or she would have to *sleep* in a temporary state of death until the time comes for the restoration of all things. Just before the time of restoration, the dead and the living will be judged to determine who will have a part in the Earth made new. (The dead are judged shortly before the Second Coming and the living are judged through the mark of the beast test. Revelation 12:15-18)

At the Second Coming, those individuals found to be righteous during the judgment of the dead will be resurrected and given eternal life. The individuals who are alive at the Second Coming that have not submitted to the mark of the beast test will be "caught up in the air with those resurrected from the dead." (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

The people who are alive at the Second Coming and have received the mark of the beast tattoo will be killed by the sword that comes out of the mouth of Jesus (Revelation 20:45) and the birds will eat their flesh (Revelation 19:11-21).

At the end of the millennium, all of the wicked from all ages will be resurrected to watch and understand three things:

1. God's generous offer of salvation to all mankind through the gift of Jesus
2. The reality of God, His sovereignty and kingdom and man's accountability to God
3. A comprehensive review of each person's life presenting the reasons why God refused to save him

As you can see, the subject of the millennium is important because it explains how God finally disposes of sin. For this reason, the subject of the millennium is directly connected to the doctrine of man's mortality. When a person dies, he or she neither goes to Heaven nor Hell. Instead, the body decays back to dust (Genesis 2:17).

The breath of life (the spirit) returns to God and the soul or intellect is suspended in an unconscious state (John 11:11-14; Ecclesiastes 9:5,6; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Acts 2:29,34). That person's life, as recorded in the books of deeds, is judged by Christ at an appointed time, just before the Second Coming.

Jesus carefully reviews each man's actions as recorded in the books of Heaven. When Christ comes, the dead are resurrected in one of two resurrections — the first resurrection is at the Second Coming and the second resurrection (for the purpose of eradicating the sin problem) is at the end of the millennium. (John 5:28,29; John 6:39-54; Luke 11:31,32)

Obviously, I do not believe anyone is burning in hell right now, nor are the saints rejoicing in Heaven. An in-depth study in the Bible does not support an eternally burning hell. If the wages for sin are burning in hell for eternity, then Jesus never paid the price for sin — He would still be burning in hell.

The Bible states that the wages of sin is death — not a life of torment. The dead are nonexistent, they cannot talk, think or communicate. It is simple, the souls of dead people do not exist just like your soul did not exist before you were born. When the resurrection occurs, God will restore the soul/persona of each person just as he was when he went to the grave.

This is why Paul writes that we shall be known, even as we are now known. (1 Corinthians 13:12) Yes, there are some texts that seem, on the surface, to contradict this finding; however, when the weight of Biblical evidence is studied to evaluate all that the Bible has to say on this topic, I find the above conclusion to be the *only* solution to several issues that are involved.

(Note: If you would like to review my article on the condition of man after death, please call the office for a reprint of my *Day Star* article “Who's burning in hell right now?”)

Some People are in Heaven

Yes, I know there are a few chosen ones who God has already taken to Heaven such as Enoch, Moses and Elijah. A small group also ascended with Jesus at the time of His ascension, but I am writing about humanity in general. (Genesis 5:23,24; Jude 9; 2 Kings 2:11-12; Matthew 27:51-53; Psalm 68:18)

When a person dies, his or her soul ceases to exist. Our souls do not have some intelligent existence before we are born and our souls do not have some intelligent existence outside the body after we die. Certainly, some people could question upon looking at the evening news, whether there is much intelligence on Earth anyway.

However, if you disagree on the matter of soul-sleep, do not quit reading yet. Please allow me to explain further.

Groups of people

I need to briefly summarize how God deals with seven groups of people at the time of the Second Coming. Many people do not realize that there are seven distinct groups of people and the Bible addresses how God will deal with each group. Keep in mind that when it comes to salvation, there is one PLAN, one faith, one Lord, one baptism, etc.

However, when we reach the very day of the Second Coming, there will be seven distinct groups of people for God to deal with. If we merge or mix God's plans for one group with another, hopeless confusion will result. So, let us examine each group independently and determine how God deals with them.

Here are the seven groups:

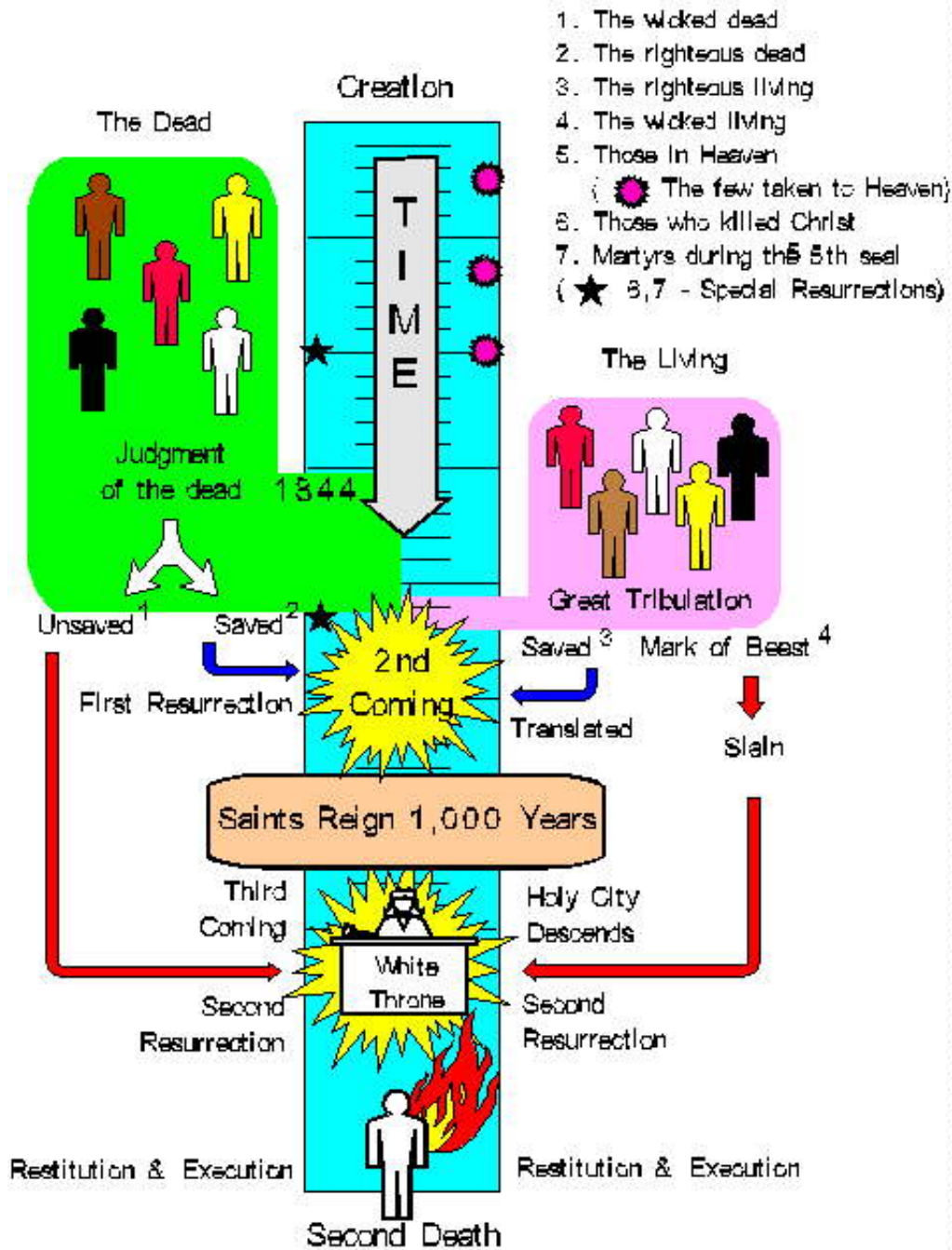
1. The wicked dead
2. The righteous dead
3. The righteous living
4. The wicked living
5. The “chosen few” previously taken to Heaven
6. Those who crucified Christ
7. Those who will die for Christ during the 5th seal

Obviously, the first four groups presume the presence of a judgment, for how can a person be classified as wicked or righteous without being judged? Again, let the point be emphasized that at the time of the Second Coming, these classifications will exist because the judgment of the dead and the living will have already been completed.

The living will have either rejected or accepted the mark of the beast — thus they judge themselves. All of the dead will have been judged by Christ to be wicked or righteous. Thus, the end-time judgments produce four groups of people: the wicked and righteous dead and the wicked and righteous living.

Look at the illustration and notice how the seven groups are managed. As you read the following description of each group, refer to the chart below.

How God Deals with Seven Groups of People



1. For the sake of illustration, let us assume that Cain (the first born who killed Abel) died in the year 3200 B.C. He has been “nonexistent” for 5,196 years, yet he will be resurrected. Notice on the chart that “Judgment Day” for the dead began in 1844. I am assuming that Cain was one of the first persons to be judged. Let us also assume that

Jesus, the Judge, refused to offer Cain eternal life because of lifelong rebellion.

Therefore, Cain is not disturbed at the Second Coming. He sleeps right through that glorious day. However, he will be resurrected after the millennium when Christ returns to Earth in an even more glorious display of power! At the end of the 1,000 years, the wicked dead from all ages will be raised to behold the Holy City and meet their Maker at the White Throne. Here is an important point: The wicked do not meet their Maker so that He may determine whether they shall be saved or lost. No, that was determined in the judgment which took place before the Second Coming. So, what is the point of this meeting at the Great White Throne? Simple. Jesus will reveal to each person why He could not save them. Every person is due this dignity. Then, and only then, will Jesus proceed to execute justice upon the wicked in a twostep process. First, the wicked must provide restitution (suffer) for the evil deeds they committed against their fellow human beings (the amount of suffering which was already determined by the saints during the 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4) and then, the wicked will be fully destroyed because of defiant rebellion against God. Both the suffering for evil deeds and the destruction for rebellion against God will be accomplished through fire and burning sulphur. **Key Point:** The wicked dead are not disturbed at the Second Coming.

2. Again, for the sake of illustration, let's assume that Abel, the first person to die, died in the year 3970 B.C. at the age of 30 years. Abel has been "nonexistent" for 5,266 years, yet he too, will be resurrected. Again, notice on the chart that "Judgment Day" began in 1844 and Abel, being the second person to be born but the first person to die, was the first person to be judged. (I am assuming people are judged in the order they die.) Let us assume that Jesus, the Judge, granted Abel eternal life when He judged him because of Abel's faith. Even though Abel is found righteous through faith, he continues to sleep until the resurrection of the righteous at the Second Coming. Abel will be resurrected at the Second Coming and during the 1,000 years, he will sit in judgment of Cain to determine fair restitution (suffering) for all of Cain's evil deeds, including his own murder by Cain. The righteous will even judge the evil angels and determine what their restitution should be! (1 Corinthians 6:1-3) All of the righteous dead will be resurrected at the Second Coming of Christ. This resurrection occurs at the beginning of the 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4,5). They will reign with Christ during the 1,000 years and they will determine the appropriate punishment (suffering/restitution) required for the wicked. Notice, the righteous do not determine if a person is saved. Christ alone makes that determination *before* He returns to Earth. That determination was made by Christ in a preAdvent judgment as He reviewed the books of record. **Key Point:** The righteous dead are in a state of temporary "sleep" until the Second Coming and then they reign triumphant with Christ during the 1,000 years.

3. The righteous who are still living at the time of the Second Coming will be a smaller group than the first two groups. These people are identified by their refusal to accept the mark of the beast. When Jesus pierces the dark, rolling clouds at the Second Coming, the living righteous will be caught up with the righteous dead to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). As Revelation's story unfolds, I believe the number of righteous people who live through the Great Tribulation without experiencing death will be small compared to the total number of righteous who die during that time. (Revelation 17:6; 18:24) The righteous living and the righteous dead will be united at the Second Coming and they will sit together to judge the wicked during the 1,000 years. Again, their

judgment is not for the purpose of deciding who is going to be saved or lost. That has already been determined by the only One who has such authority. (John 5:22) Rather, their work will be focused on the executive phase of judgment. They will determine the administration of justice by Heaven's faithful rule: "It shall be done unto you as you did unto others — plus 20%." (This is the reciprocal of the golden rule.) **Key Point:** The righteous living do not experience death, and they meet Jesus in the air, not on Earth.

4. Now we come to a very large group of people compared to the living; however, on the global scale of billions and billions who have lived upon Earth, this is a rather small group. (Most of the people who have lived on this planet are currently dead.) This group is the wicked who are *living* at the time of the Second Coming. These people have lived through the Great Tribulation and have chosen the mark of the beast. Notice on the chart, that this group of people are not judged in the preAdvent judgment that began in 1844. Neither are these people judged by Jesus from the books of record. Instead, these people condemn themselves! The mark of the beast *test* causes everyone to make a tough decision. Those who chose to rebel against God will choose the mark of the beast. God does not need to judge them, for taking the indelible tattoo is a conscious, open act of rebellion against God's authority. So remember, the living determine their eternal outcome. The mark of the beast test will be "Judgment Day" for all who live on Earth. The people that receive the mark of the beast will be destroyed at the Second Coming by the sword that comes out of the mouth of Christ. The enemies of His kingdom will be killed and the birds of the air will feed upon their flesh. (Revelation 19:19-21; Heb. 4:12,13)

Key Point: The wicked people who are alive at Jesus' second coming (those having the mark of the beast) will be killed by the sword of truth at Christ's glorious return and will sleep through the 1,000 years.

5. Now we come to the fifth group. The Bible is clear that God has taken some human beings to Heaven already. (Their ascension to Heaven is marked by the little round markers on the chart.) Enoch, Moses, Elijah and others are known to be there. In fact, I believe the 24 elders of Revelation were among those individuals taken from Earth! The interesting point about those taken to Heaven before Christ paid the penalty for sin, is that they were in Heaven "on a credit card", figuratively speaking. In other words, God took them to Heaven before Christ died on the cross at Calvary as a sign to believers down through the ages that He fully intended to pay the price for sin at the appointed time.

Key Point: This group of people have not been happy in Heaven. How could they be happy after watching the people on Earth for a few thousand years? Think about it. Does the evening news make you happy? What if you could see all the evil deeds that are done on Earth as they do?

6. The Bible teaches that those who approved and participated in the crucifixion of Christ will be resurrected to behold His appearing in glory (Revelation 1:7). There will be a special resurrection about 45 days before Christ appears for these people.

Key Point: This group will be amazed, awed and horrified when they see Jesus Christ return in all His glory.

7. There will be a special blessing for those who are murdered for the Lord during the Great Tribulation. I believe they will be resurrected in the same special resurrection that occurs 45 days before Christ appears, so that they might also see His glorious return.

This resurrection is sometimes called “the special resurrection” to contrast it with the resurrection which includes all the righteous from ages past occurring at the Second Coming.

Key Point: This group will be resurrected in the presence of their enemies, right before their murderers! I wonder who will be more surprised?

We Have to Know how God Deals with the Dead

Because the millennium deals with these seven groups of people, and five of the seven groups are dead (or soon will be dead), it is important to understand God's plan for dealing with them. This has been job one. Next time, we will go through Revelation 20 so that it makes sense just as it reads. We will also try to answer the baker's dozen questions listed at the beginning of the article.

If you have some questions why not send them in?