

## **MUST SATAN BE RELEASED? INDEED HE MUST BE: TOWARD A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF REVELATION 20:3**

Gregory H. Harris, Th.D.  
Professor of Bible Exposition  
The Master's Seminary

*In Revelation 20, God will act precisely as one would expect if one reads His promises in a literal, normative understanding. Simply stated and among other reasons, Satan must be released so that God can demonstrate to Israel and to the world the veracity of His covenant promises, completely and precisely fulfilling them in minute and specific details—all the way to the arrival of the eternal state.*

### **Introduction and Purpose**

Many statements within Scripture contain the word “must.” Perhaps the most famous occurrence is Jesus’ declaration to Nicodemus in John 3:7: “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”<sup>1</sup> The word “must” (*dei*), most commonly used in the Greek with an infinitive, conveys the idea of the necessity of an event.<sup>2</sup> It does not convey the sense as something that will happen, such as would be expected in a normal future indicative tense, but rather as something being necessary or used in the sense of a “divine destiny or unavoidable fate.”<sup>3</sup>

If John 3:7 is the most famous “must” statement in the Bible, perhaps the most unexpected use is its next-to-the-last occurrence in Scripture, namely, Rev 20:1–3.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stipulated, all Scripture reference used are from the NASB 1977 edition. “Thee” and “Thou” are changed throughout to modern usage.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Grundmann, “δεῖ” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:21–25.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d. ed., rev F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 172. See also, “Must,” in *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. William D. Mounce, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 460.

These verses reveal specific events that will transpire and specifically notes one event that must occur:

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

As with all previous “must statements,” it is not only that Satan will be released, as seen with the future tense in Rev 20:7 (“And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,”), but also Scripture plainly states that after the thousand years are over, Satan “must be released for a short time.” Chafer considered that, “No small mystery gathers around the fact that Satan is released from the abyss even for ‘a little season.’”<sup>4</sup> He further refers to it as “this strange release.”<sup>5</sup> Based on the normal use of “must” in other Scriptures, many scholars also mark its use in Rev 20:3. Thomas writes in regard to Satan’s release, “It is a divine necessity . . . for the dragon to be released ‘after these things.’”<sup>6</sup> Swete concurs, writing in reference to the future release that “it must come; there is a necessity for it (*dei*).”<sup>7</sup> Alford refers to the usage as “the *dei* of prophecy; *must* according to the necessity of God’s purposes.”<sup>8</sup>

Walvoord does not exaggerate the massive theological divide that emerges from these verses: “The dramatic prophecy contained in these three verses has been the subject of endless dispute because to some extent the whole controversy between premillennarians and amillennarians hangs upon it.”<sup>9</sup> Powell notes that “Revelation 20:1–6 is perhaps the most controversial passage in the Book of Revelation.”<sup>10</sup> Regarding the importance of interpreting Revelation 20, Walvoord further notes:

The passage yields to patient exegesis, and there is no solid reason for taking it in other than its ordinary sense. According to the prediction the angel is empowered for six functions: (1) to lay hold on the dragon, (2) to bind him for 1,000 years, (3) to cast him into the abyss, (4) to shut him up, that is, to use the key which will lock up the abyss, (5) to set a seal upon Satan which will render

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer *Systematic Theology*. (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948), 5:360.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 411.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1906; reprint Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 258.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*. 4 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, 1903; reprint Chicago: Moody Press, 1958) 4:731 (*italics in the original*).

<sup>9</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 290.

<sup>10</sup> Charles E. Powell, “Progression Versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1–6,” *BSac* 163 (January–March 2006): 94.

him inactive in his work of deceiving the nations, (6) to loose him after the thousand years. At every point, however, the prediction has been disputed.<sup>11</sup>

Obviously, Rev 20:3 should not be interpreted in a vacuum, isolated, and removed from the rest of the text. Consequently, the way one approaches the events from Rev 19:11–20:10 greatly factors into its interpretation and has usually been determined in one’s theology long before coming to the specifics of Revelation 20.

For those who hold to Scripture as being God’s Word, Powell presents two distinct groups of interpretation of this prophecy, with the first he calls the “preconsummationist perspective”: “In this view the events of verses 1–6 will occur *before* the return of Christ to the earth. Most preconsummationists have adopted a recapitulation view of the passage, an approach usually associated with amillennialism” including both the amillennial and postmillennial views of Revelation:<sup>12</sup>

This preconsummationist-recapitulation-amillennial view includes the following tenets. (1) The binding of Satan represents Christ’s victory over the powers of darkness accomplished at the cross. (2) The one thousand years are symbolic of a long, indeterminate period corresponding to the church age. (3) At the end of the present age Satan will be loosed briefly to wreak havoc and persecute the church. (4) The fire coming down from heaven to consume the wicked is symbolic of Christ’s second coming. (5) A general resurrection and judgment of the wicked and the righteous will occur at Christ’s coming, followed by the creation of the new heavens and a new earth.<sup>13</sup>

Sam Storms would be a representative of this position and presents what he sees as a serious problem with premillennial interpretation:

If we were to take the events of 20:1–3 as historically subsequent to the events of 19:11–21, a serious problem arises in that 20:1–3 would describe an action designed to prevent Satanic deception of the nations who had already been *deceived* (16:13–16) and consequently *destroyed* in 19:19–21. In other words, it makes little sense to speak of protecting the nations from deception by Satan in 20:1–3 *after* they have just been both deceived by Satan (16:16; cf. 19:19–20) and destroyed by Christ at his return (19:11–21; cf. 19:19–20).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 290–91. Walvoord presents a very logical biblical basis that Satan is not currently bound and that this event is part of the Lord’s return to earth in Revelation 19 (*ibid.*, 282–95). See Steven Thompson, “The End of Satan,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 37:2 (Autumn 1999): 257–60 for a listing of some of the scholarly works on Rev 20:1–3 that mostly present a figurative understanding of the text.

<sup>12</sup> Powell, “Progression Versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1–6,” 94 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*,” 94–95. See R. Fowler White, “Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1–10,” *WTJ* 51 (Fall 1989): 319–44 for a more detailed argumentation for this view.

<sup>14</sup> Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor Imprint, 2013), 431 (emphasis in the original).

Storms explains Satan's binding in Rev 20:1–3 thusly: "The Gentiles ('nations') are portrayed as being in darkness with respect to the gospel, having been blinded ('deceived') while under the dominion of Satan. However, as a result of Christ's first coming, such deception no longer obtains. The nations or Gentiles may now receive the forgiveness of sins and the divine inheritance."<sup>15</sup>

The alternate position to the preconsummationist view Powell calls postconsummationism:

In this view the events in verses 1–6 *follow* the second coming of Christ depicted in 19:11–21. Thus it involves chronological progression between the two passages. This view is essentially premillennial. The postconsummationist-progressive-premillennial viewpoint holds these four tenets. (1) The binding of Satan is yet future; it will take place when Christ returns. (2) The one thousand years are a literal period in which Christ will reign on earth from Jerusalem and with His people. (3) Satan will be loosed for a brief period at the end of the millennium, and this will be followed by the resurrection and judgment of the wicked at the Great White Throne judgment. (4) The new heavens and the new earth will be created after the millennium, that is a thousand years after Christ's second coming.<sup>16</sup>

Michael Vlach is a representative of such a position:<sup>17</sup> "The events of Rev 20:1–10 follow the second coming of Jesus described in Rev 19:11. There is sequential progression, not recapitulation in this section."<sup>18</sup> Further:

Much attention often is given to whether the activities of Satan are curtailed or ceased, but before one even considers the activities of Satan, one must recognize what is happening to Satan himself, as a personal being. Satan himself is incarcerated and confined in a real place, a place called "the abyss." *Our point here is that not just a specific function of Satan (i.e. deceiving the nations) is hindered; Satan himself is absolutely confined to a place that results in a complete cessation of all that he does.*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 441. In argument against this view would be the conversion of the Gentiles of Nineveh during Jonah's ministry. These Gentiles received the forgiveness of sins and a divine inheritance, and yet this was done before Satan is bound in Revelation 20.

<sup>16</sup> Powell, "Progression Versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1–6," 95 (emphasis in the original). Powell adds in support of this position, "The current article presents three arguments in defense of premillennialism that have often been overlooked. These concern (a) the imprisonment of Satan compared with imprisonment and binding imagery mentioned elsewhere in Revelation and the New Testament, (b) the reign of the saints in 20:4–6 compared with the saints' reign mentioned elsewhere in Revelation, and (c) the significance of the accusative case for the extent of time in reference to the thousand years" (ibid., 97–98).

<sup>17</sup> Michael J. Vlach, "The Kingdom of God and the Millennium," *MSJ* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 225–54.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 246 (emphasis in the original).

Vlach concludes: “The truth that Satan is totally incarcerated during the millennium is not compatible with the views of amillennialism and postmillennialism.”<sup>20</sup>

In *Kingdom Through Covenant*, Gentry and Wellum present a twofold purpose: (1) they “want to show how central the concept of ‘covenant’ is to the narrative plot structure of the Bible,” and (2) to demonstrate “how a number of crucial theological differences within Christian theology, and the resolution of those differences, are directly related to one’s understanding of how the biblical covenants unfold and relate to each other.”<sup>21</sup> Subsequently, they land somewhat between the two previous interpretations:

But where the authors want to make a significant contribution is in regard to *their* understanding of how to “put together” the biblical covenants. They assert that both covenant theologians and dispensationalists have presented understandings of the covenants that “are not quite right” and “go awry at a number of points.” The authors want to present *a via media*—an alternative approach to covenant theology and dispensationalism that is not entirely dismissive of either but offers a better way. This middle path approach they identify as “progressive covenantalism” which is a species of “new covenant theology.”<sup>22</sup>

At the heart of Gentry and Wellum’s disagreement with dispensationalism is dispensationalism’s position on Israel and the land promises from God. Vlach explains: “On the other hand, the authors say that dispensationalism makes a significant error by holding that the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant are still in force for national Israel. They say that dispensationalists do not rightly grasp that the land is fulfilled in Christ and is typical of the coming new creation. Thus, there will be no literal fulfillment of land for national Israel.”<sup>23</sup> Consequently:

According to the authors, Jesus is the “antitype” of Israel who fulfills both Israel and Israel’s land. Since Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel and the land, dispensationalists err in expecting future significance for Israel and Israel’s land. *Typology, then, is at the heart of the difference between dispensationalism and the approach offered by Gentry and Wellum.*<sup>24</sup>

However, Gentry and Wellum’s approach to the fulfillment of the land promises is problematic:

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>21</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2012), 21.

<sup>22</sup> Michael J. Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way? An Analysis of Gentry and Wellum’s *Kingdom Through Covenant*,” *MSJ* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 6 (*italics in the original*).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 (*italics in the original*). See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 122, 706.

As the biblical covenants unfold, there are two main fulfilments of the land promises. It is first fulfilled in the days of Joshua (Josh. 21:43–45) and secondly in the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 4:20–21), but in each case, the fulfilment of the land promises falls short due to the failure of the nation and the Davidic kings. In addition, it is important to note the idea of *multiple* fulfilments is also instructive.<sup>25</sup>

Based on the tenuous and less-than-persuasive assertion that Josh 21:43–45 and 1 Kings 4:20–21 prove that God has already fulfilled the land promises has significant problems to overcome.<sup>26</sup> Also, it would be hard to explain how multiple, incomplete land promises somehow fulfill the land promises that never have been fulfilled in their most complete and comprehensive sense.

Disappointingly, in the midst of their approximately 850-page book and with their typological understanding of God's covenants, Gentry and Wellum completely ignore all events and individuals given in Revelation 19–20 associated with the Lord's return and reign. With their Scripture Index containing *not even one reference* pertaining to anything from Revelation 19–20, evidently these chapters must not factor into their theology.<sup>27</sup> It is hard to argue against their concerns with either dispensational or covenant theology and their attempts to present a better way without at least dealing with these verses where the implementation of God's covenants—or, in some cases, the lack thereof—play such an important role in understanding the Book of Revelation and much of prophecy. Thus this article will deal with theologians who at least address these extremely important chapters on both the kingdom and the covenants of God.

The purpose of this article is to determine whether or not there is a biblical rationale for the absolute necessity that Satan must be released (Rev 20:3). This will be done by (1) briefly examining different approaches to Rev 20:3; (2) briefly examining different approaches to the covenant promises God made to Israel to see if a literal hermeneutic has basis; and (3) to implement these promises into the text to see if these covenant promises fit a normative understanding of what Rev 20:1–10 states will happen.

### **A Brief Examination of Various Approaches to Revelation 20:3**

Generally, the responses to why Satan must be released fall into three categories. The first approach is that one should not attempt to understand why Satan must be released. Robert Mounce is a representative of the first group who states, "*It is*

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<sup>25</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 712 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>26</sup> For argumentation against Joshua 21 as being a fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant land promises, see Gregory H. Harris, "Did God Fulfill Every Good Promise?: Toward a Biblical Understanding of Joshua 21:43–45," *MSJ* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 55–83. See also by the same author, "Did God Fulfill Every Good Promise?: Toward a Biblical Understanding of Joshua 21:43–45" (Part 2), *MSJ* 24, no. 1 (Fall 2013): 69–96, which deals with 1 Kings 4:20–21 and the problems of multiple fulfillments.

<sup>27</sup> See Scripture Index, Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 848.

*futile to speculate* just why there needs to be yet another conflict” in Revelation 20.<sup>28</sup> Swete goes a step further stating, “*It is in vain to speculate* on the grounds of this necessity.”<sup>29</sup> However, the perception that it is “futile” or “in vain” to speculate often closes a door that may never have been opened to investigation of the text. While being in full agreement that speculation cannot be equated with “thus says the Lord,” at least biblical texts should be investigated before arriving at such broad and encompassing conclusions.

The second approach for those who hold to the inspired text and look for a future fulfillment does not address the use of “must” in Rev 20:3, but instead deals with Satan’s actual release that will transpire in Rev 20:7–10. For instance, in an excellent article which explains his biblical base for understanding Revelation 19–20 as literal truths, Walvoord does not address the “must” of Rev 20:3.<sup>30</sup> Of course, this does not mean that such scholars do not believe or recognize these verses nor deem them unimportant; it is rather that they shift their focus to the more descriptive account of the actual events in Rev 20:7–10.<sup>31</sup> This is helpful, but it neither answers nor addresses the use and significance of Satan’s “must be released.”

In the third category are many adherents who do note the use of “must” in Rev 20:3, mark the theological significance of this word based on its normative use elsewhere, look for future events to transpire in Revelation 20, but often leave it as some sovereign work of God hidden from man.<sup>32</sup> Seiss describes it this way: “Some interest or righteousness and moral government renders it proper that he should be allowed this last limited freedom.”<sup>33</sup> Others, such as Govett, deduce reasons why Satan must be released: (1) to demonstrate man, if left to himself, will choose sin even in the most favorable circumstances; (2) to demonstrate God’s foreknowledge of all man’s

<sup>28</sup> Robert H. Mounce, “Revelation,” *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 354 (emphasis added).

<sup>29</sup> Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, 258 (emphasis added).

<sup>30</sup> John F. Walvoord, “The Theological Significance of Revelation 20:1–6.” *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*. Edited by Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 227–35. See specifically in this article the section entitled “The Binding of Satan,” 229–34.

<sup>31</sup> See Vlach, “The Kingdom of God and the Millennium,” 244–49; James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory In Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 548–49; Matthew Waymeyer, “What About Revelation 20?” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plan: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, eds. John F. MacArthur and Richard L. Mayhue (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 123–40; John MacArthur, *Revelation 12–22*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), 233–36, does not deal with the *dei* phrase and instead refers the reader to notes on Rev 22:7–10. Powell, “Progression Versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1–6,” 96–107 argues strongly for the literal, future binding of Satan for a thousand years as being unlike anything in history past and has a chart which states “Satan is to be ‘released for a short time’ after his imprisonment, but does not address the ‘must be released’” (*ibid.*, 103).

<sup>32</sup> For example, G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*. The New Century Bible Commentary. Matthew Black NT ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 285–86. See Robert L. Thomas, “Exegetical Digest of Revelation 15–22,” (N.p.: by the author, 1993), 249 for a listing of additional authors and their rationale.

<sup>33</sup> J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (n.p.: Charles C. Cook: 1900; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950) 476–77.

actions as well as His own; (3) to demonstrate the incurable evil and wickedness of Satan; (4) to justify eternal punishment that occurs in the remainder of the chapter.<sup>34</sup>

While in agreement with much of what has been written about God's sovereignty, man's depravity, and Satan's unchanging evil, this article will attempt to give an additional and corroborative biblical rationale for why Satan must be released (Rev 20:3).

### Brief Examination of God's Covenant Promises to Israel

In an article regarding God's promises to the nation of Israel in the Book of Revelation, Robert Thomas quotes Bruce Waltke and becomes a good beginning point on the contrasts of interpretations in matters related to Revelation 20:

Bruce Waltke finds no textual linkage in Revelation 20 to Israel's OT promises regarding a kingdom. He writes, "In the former essay I argued among other things that if there is any tension in one's interpretation between the Old Testament and the New, priority must be given to the New; that Rev 20:1–10 cannot be linked textually with Israel's covenants and promises; that no New Testament passage clearly teaches a future Jewish millennium; and that the New Testament interprets imagery of the Old Testament with a reference to the present spiritual reign of Christ from his heavenly throne."<sup>35</sup>

Thomas' article examines the Book of Revelation to determine what kinds of fulfillments are specified in the three major covenants that God made with Israel, namely, the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New Covenants, and he argues for the literal fulfillment of these covenants throughout the Revelation, demonstrating the dividing line of interpretation is with those who do not understand such promises to be literally true for national Israel.<sup>36</sup> Thomas further shows the results of this hermeneutic

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Govett, *The Apocalypse Expounded* (London: Chas. J. Thynne, 1920), 506–08. After noting that the final answer rests with God, Thomas offers: "Yet one purpose may be a partial answer. Through his release the whole universe will see that after a thousand years of his imprisonment and an ideal reign on earth, Satan is incurably wicked and men's hearts are still perverse enough to allow him to gather an army of such an immense size" (Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 411). David J. MacLeod, "The Third 'Last Thing': The Binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1–3)," *BSac* 156 (Oct–Dec 1999): 483 writes: "For some reason, grounded in the divine will, Satan will be released and will deceive the nations again." MacLeod points to further elaboration on why Satan must be released would be in his later article on Rev 20:7–10. See by the same author where, "The Fifth Last 'Thing': The Release of Satan and Man's Final Rebellion," *BSac* 157 (April–June 2000): 204–5, who sees the two reasons for the release as first, to demonstrate the incorrigibility of Satan and second, to demonstrate the depravity of man.

<sup>35</sup> Robert L. Thomas, "Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse," *MSJ* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 29. Thomas quotes Bruce K. Waltke, "A Response" in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 353. Waltke refers to his earlier works "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1988), 263–88.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas does so by contrasting three relatively recent evangelical commentaries on Revelation and shows, for instance, "the radical disagreement of allegorists in their handling of Revelation 11 illustrates the subjective nature of interpretation once the interpreter has forsaken the grammatical–historical principles" (Thomas, "Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse," 34). The three commentaries critiqued in his



throughout his article in passages that deal directly with national Israel that allegorists must apply to the church or to some other matters and yet about which they often disagree among themselves as to exactly what or how something should be allegorized.<sup>37</sup> This article will not argue the points Thomas already made in his article but rather will deal with a normative understanding of the text.<sup>38</sup>

Obviously, this article cannot cover every item in matters related to the covenants of God, but at least some of the important features can be noted. In giving the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised the nation of Israel a people, the land, and the ability to be a source of blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1–3, 7).<sup>39</sup> Of special note for this article is God’s original promise to Israel “to curse the ones who curse you,”<sup>40</sup> initially given in Genesis 12:3, and reiterated and developed in subsequent Scripture.<sup>41</sup> For example, in a section rich with wonderful and multiple Messianic promises, God used Balaam to respond to Balak’s request to have Balaam curse

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article are Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B of Word Biblical Commentary, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Nashville: Word, 1998); and Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> For example, Thomas gives a chart on Rev 11:1–11 and shows that Beale and Osborne often disagree between themselves as to exactly what or how something should be allegorized (Thomas, “Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse,” 35–38). Collectively, Beale and Osborne disagree with a literal understanding in every one of the fourteen areas cited in these verses (*ibid.*, 36).

<sup>38</sup> Such an example of the difference between a normal understanding of the text versus not understanding it as such is evident in how this influences all components that connect and affects the interpretation of other verses elsewhere. For instance, Dave Mathewson, “A Reexamination of the Millennium in Rev 20:1–6,” *JETS* 44, no. 2 (June 2001), 248, states, “As I have suggested, the one thousand years does not refer to a period of time, but is symbolic of the ultimate triumph and vindication of the saints.” Consequently this directly affects his understanding of what the binding of Satan entails, if anything: “The binding, release, and final judgment of Satan may simply reflect a traditional apocalyptic motif as Isa 24:21–22; *1 Enoch* 10:4–6, 11–13; and Jude 6, which reflect the common themes of binding and imprisonment of demonic beings (Azazel in *1 Enoch* 10:4) until a future time of judgment” (*ibid.*, 239).

<sup>39</sup> See Keith Essex, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” *MSJ* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999), 191–212 for a very helpful article on matters pertaining to this eternally important covenant. See also Thomas, “Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse,” 31–40.

<sup>40</sup> For matters relating to Yahweh’s cursing of those who curse Israel, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 54–57. See also Leonard J. Coppes, “כָּלַךְ,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. 2 volumes. Edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, 2:800–801. For various derivatives that convey the ideas of “to curse, to be insignificant, to have a low opinion of; to be insignificant, contemptible to despise, disdain, have scant regard for, despise,” see “כָּלַךְ,” Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. and ed. by M. E. J. Richardson, electronic ed., Accordance 10 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1994–2000), 3:1103.

<sup>41</sup> Contra Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2004), 148, who in writing as an antagonist against dispensationalism, concludes, “There is, however, no indication in the text of Genesis 12 that this promise of blessing and warning and cursing was ever intended to extend beyond Abraham.”

national Israel in Numbers 22–24.<sup>42</sup> God's command and declaration to Balaam was "You shall not curse this people for they are blessed," based on the promises of God from the Abrahamic Covenant and not on the disobedience of the Jewish people under the Mosaic Covenant. Then in the midst of multiple prophecies of the coming Messiah who will rule the nations, Yahweh repeats in Num 24:9 what He has previously promised in Gen 12:3: "Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you."<sup>43</sup> Consequently, in the millennial kingdom when Messiah reigns, not only will the land promises be fulfilled and all the nations of the earth blessed through the Messiah, but God's promise to curse the ones who curse Israel and the Messiah will still be operative.<sup>44</sup>

The promises Yahweh made through the Davidic Covenant are numerous as well (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89).<sup>45</sup> Thomas asserts that "the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant is a major theme of Revelation from beginning to end."<sup>46</sup> When Messiah reigns on David's throne, the entire earth will receive benefits. In particular, Scripture presents multiple promises that relate to earthly Jerusalem and the regathered nation of Israel and reveals numerous characteristics associated with the Lord's return both to judge and to rule. Even a small sampling of important verses shows that when Messiah reigns on David's throne, the promises that God made will factor into interpreting the final release of Satan in Revelation 20. For example, Mic 5:2 promises to the Jewish people: "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:5 concludes this section with another promise from Yahweh: "And this One will be our peace." So when Messiah reigns, God's promise of peace is a major component of His reign.

In the same manner, Isa 9:6 contains prophecies of Messiah's birth and a tremendously important pronouncement that He will both judge and rule: "For a child

<sup>42</sup> For an exposition of some of the Messianic prophecies in Numbers 22–24, see the suburb article by Ronald B. Allen, "The Theology of the Balaam Oracles," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*. Eds. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 79–119.

<sup>43</sup> James M. Hamilton, Jr. "The Seed of Woman and the Blessing of Abraham." *TynBul* 59 (2007): 264, writes, "The placement of the allusion to the ruler from the line of Judah (Num. 24:9a) next to the allusion to the blessing of Abraham (24:9b) interweaves these lines of promise. If it was not clear before Numbers 24:9 that these promises belong together, this verse sounds the note that unites the themes. This union means that the blessing of Abraham will come through the king who will arise from the line of Judah, reminding readers of the Pentateuch of the promise to Abraham that he would sire kings (Gen. 17:6; see the references to Israel's king in Num. 23:21; 24:7). Balaam's oracles, then, clarify the blessing of Abraham by linking it to the king from Judah."

<sup>44</sup> For support regarding the land promises of God to Israel, see Walter C. Kaiser, "The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View," *BSac* 138 (1981): 302–12, and Jeffrey L. Townsend's superb article, "Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament," *BSac* 142 (Oct–Dec 1985): 320–37.

<sup>45</sup> See Michael A. Grisanti, "The Davidic Covenant," *MSJ* 10:2 (Fall 1999): 233–50.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas, "Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse," 40. See his development and defense of the importance of the Davidic Covenant in interpreting Revelation (Ibid., 40–46). In writing about those who omit the importance of the Davidic Covenant, Thomas adds, "Of course, at this point neither Beale, Aune, nor Osborne say anything about a fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. That is because Revelation 11:15 creates an impossible situation for those who interpret the book nonliterally, but for those who interpret it literally, it marks the fulfillment by God of the promises He made to David, and ultimately to Abraham too" (ibid., 45).

will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.” However, in Isa 9:7 the same God offers additional promises that never were fulfilled during the first advent of Jesus: “There will be *no end to the increase of His government or of peace*, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this” (emphasis added). Isaiah 9:7 is as much a part of “Scripture cannot be broken” as is any other part. When Messiah reigns on David’s throne in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant promise of God, one of the characteristics will be that “there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace.”

Similarly, when God revealed that He would at some point in the future make the New Covenant, Yahweh again made promises for peace in another everlasting covenant in Jer 31:31–34.<sup>47</sup> This prophecy is especially striking when one studies the Book of Jeremiah as a whole because it is the disobedient nation in chapters 2–29 who receives the future promises, especially in Jeremiah 30–33:

Expositors generally agree that chapters 30–33 constitute a group of prophecies. The section has been called “The Book of Consolation.” . . . The remarkable feature of chapters 30–33 is that, though written during a time of deep distress of Jerusalem, they foretell a glorious future for the nation (cf. the latter part of 1:10). Up to this point in the book, Jeremiah’s prophecies have been threatening and gloomy. . . . Now in chapters 30–33 the prophetic outlooks change.<sup>48</sup>

When the Book of Jeremiah is considered as a whole, these four chapters of promised renewal and glory radiate with divine hope compared to the mainly condemnatory tone of the remainder of the book. The whole context of the Book of Consolation “meticulously connects the new covenant strophe with a literal restoration of the Jewish nation.”<sup>49</sup> Parallel passages referring to the New Covenant always involve Yahweh and the nation of Israel.<sup>50</sup> As with the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, the New Covenant contains many promises of essential events that must transpire in order for Scripture to be fulfilled. In the same way, the New Covenant also presents multiple promised blessings by God that must come true as part of His holy Word, that once stated, cannot be broken.

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<sup>47</sup> For a much fuller detailed account, see Larry Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” *MSJ* 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 251–70. Thomas has “forgiveness of sins” and a “new relationship with God” as part of the New Covenant blessing God has for national Israel (Thomas, “Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse,” 46–48).

<sup>48</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 202.

<sup>49</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34,” *JETS* (Winter 1972): 15.

<sup>50</sup> Pettegrew notes: “Other names for the New Covenant include an “everlasting covenant” (Jer. 32:40): “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them. . . .”, “covenant of peace with them. . . .”, and “my covenant” or “a covenant” (Hos. 2:18–20). Cf. Bruce Ware, “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God, Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church,” 69, and Kaiser, “The Old Promises and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34,” 14.” (Pettegrew, “The New Covenant,” 253, n. 5).

The immediate context of the New Covenant begins with the phrase “Behold, days are coming” (Jer 31:31), which occurs five times within “The Book of Consolation” section of Jeremiah 30–33. Emerging in the midst of pending judgment by God (Jeremiah 1–29) comes the promise of wonderful blessings for the future. The first use is in Jer 30:3: “‘For, behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.’ The LORD says, ‘I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers, and they shall possess it.’” Three times in the immediate context occurs the term “behold, days are coming” (31:27, 31, 38) and serves as a threefold division of what God promises. The first use of “behold, days are coming” in this section is Jer 31:27–30 where God promised: “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast.” The same God who promised to break down also promises now that at some time in the future He will restore fully to the same land and the same people that He Himself already will have punished. The second use of “Behold, days are coming” in Jeremiah 31 begins the section on the New Covenant. Jer 31:31–34 promised:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

Before giving additional revelation, Yahweh interjects the absolute certainty that He will fulfill His Word based on His upholding His own creative order (Jer 31:35–37). The third and final “behold, days are coming” in this chapter, Jer 31:38–40, contains divine promises that are just as truthful and binding as are the previous two used in Jeremiah 31:

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. And the measuring line shall go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb; then it will turn to Goah. And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it shall not be plucked up, or overthrown anymore forever.”<sup>51</sup>

It must be noted that the same God who promised the forgiveness of sin with the making of a New Covenant gives further promises that, at some undisclosed time,

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<sup>51</sup> For an excellent article for the literal rebuilding of Jerusalem on earth and argument for a fulfillment of the land promises in Jeremiah 31 in the future and how these relate to other land promises, see Dennis M. Swanson, “Expansion of Jerusalem in Jer 31:38–40: Never, Already, or Not Yet?” *MSJ* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 17–34. Specially see critiques for the “never to be fulfilled” land promises (27–29) and the “realized” or “already fulfilled” land promises (29–32). Based on the specifics given in Jeremiah 31:38–40, Swanson argues persuasively that these promise await a future fulfillment on earth at the return of Jesus (32–34).

Jerusalem will be rebuilt for Himself, and from that time onward, it will never again be plucked up or overthrown forever.<sup>52</sup>

To briefly summarize God’s covenant promises to Israel when Messiah reigns, God promises: (1) Jerusalem will be rebuilt for the LORD (Jer 31:38), and (2) become “holy to the LORD” (Jer 31:40); (3) there shall be no end to peace or the increase of Messiah’s government (Isa 9:6–7); (4) Jerusalem will not “be plucked up any more or overthrown forever” (Jer 31:40), and (5), the fully operative blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant contain and continue God’s promise to curse the ones who curse you (Gen 12:3; Num 24:9).

### **An Examination of the Final Revolt in View of God’s Covenant Promises to Israel**

With these divine promises that must be fulfilled because Scripture cannot be broken, Rev 20:7–10 can now be considered:

And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.<sup>53</sup>

How would these verses be interpreted in a normative understanding if one expected God to be true to His Word? God’s subsequent actions should be expected because He has repeatedly given them in His Word, especially as seen in His covenant promises to Israel and to the rest of the world. As part of the Abrahamic Covenant promises, God’s promise to curse the ones who curse Israel would also include this final Gentile rebellion since Messiah will have previously dealt with the rebellion of the Tribulation in Revelation 19 and will have already established His kingdom on earth in Rev 20:1–6.

However, in presenting what he sees as a major problem against premillennialism, Storms argues:

*You must necessarily believe that physical death will continue to exist beyond the time of Christ’s second coming.* The reason for this is that all premillennialists must account for the rebellious and unbelieving nations in Revelation 20:7–10 who launch an assault against Christ and his people at the end of what they

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<sup>52</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 492, with their bent toward typology, interpret Jeremiah 31:38–40 as referring to the New Jerusalem.

<sup>53</sup> See MacLeod, “The Fifth Last Thing: The Release of Satan and Man’s Final Rebellion,” 207–9, for a discussion and source of how this Gog and Magog differ from previous uses elsewhere such as Ezekiel 38–39.

believe is the millennial age. Where did these people come from? They must be the unbelieving progeny born to those believers who entered the millennial age in physical, unglorified bodies. Not only they, but also the *believing* progeny will be subject to physical death (notwithstanding the alleged prolonged life-spans experienced by those who live during the millennial reign of Christ).<sup>54</sup>

Biblical answers about who these final rebels will be exists in such passages as Isa 65:20, which show a longevity of life but also of death occurring: “No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; for the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be thought accursed.” Vlach writes, “So notice two important things here with Isa 65:20—an increased longevity of life and the presence of sin which brings curses and death.”<sup>55</sup> Vlach questions when such a condition could have existed in history past and argues against it as being in the eternal state where sin will not exist; therefore concludes that this must transpire in the millennial kingdom.<sup>56</sup> Arguing against those who would say that since the nations have been destroyed in Rev 19:21 it would not be logical to speak of protecting the nations from deception in 20:1–3, Powell writes, “True, the nations are destroyed in 19:21, but that does not mean that they cannot be reconstituted later under the messianic King (Isa. 2:4; 11:10–16; Zech. 14:16–21). Believing survivors will be in the nations; they and their descendants will make up the reconstituted nations at the end of the millennium.”<sup>57</sup> Grudem writes in reference to Zechariah 14: “Here again the description does not fit the present age, for the Lord is King over all the earth in this situation. But it does not fit the eternal state either because of the disobedience and rebellion against the Lord that is clearly present.”<sup>58</sup> But with the fullness of the Davidic Covenant, God clearly promises there will be “no end to peace” (Isa 9:6–7). Consequently, in Rev 20:7–9a only an assemblage for battle will transpire in this final rebellion and not a battle itself, for a battle would go against the promised word of Messiah’s reign having no end of peace.

Yet even without the promise of never-ending peace in Isa 9:7, when Messiah reigns, if all that Scripture revealed were the promises God made when the New Covenant comes in its fullness (Jer 31:31–34), including the section of Jerusalem being rebuilt for the LORD in Jer 31:38–40, when Satan comes up against Messiah with massive Gentile forces (Rev 20:7–8) so that “they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (Rev 20:9a), Yahweh has long before determined and revealed the outcome of any such rebellion because Jerusalem, once rebuilt for the LORD, will never “be plucked up or overthrown forever” (Jer 31:40). Although the method by which God will accomplish this judgment of the final rebellion is not given until Revelation 20, God’s actions at what He

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<sup>54</sup> Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 136 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>55</sup> Vlach, “The Kingdom of God and the Millennium,” 237.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 238–40.

<sup>57</sup> Powell, “Progression Versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1–6,” 105.

<sup>58</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1129.

has revealed He will do should not be surprising because they harmonize perfectly with His previous promises that there will be no disturbance of Messiah's peace; consequently, fire from heaven will come down and devour them (Rev 20:9b). Further, God's promise to curse the ones who curse Israel (Gen 12:3; Num 24:9) is not limited only until Christ's return to earth but includes all the way to the last part of His millennial reign and will be just as operative in this final Gentile rebellion as it was when God first gave it Genesis 12.

Significantly, even before the eternal state with the new heavens and the new earth, even in the midst of His kingdom reign, evil has not run its course until the end. First Corinthians 15:20–26 corroborates this and offers a glimpse of what will eventually be described in more detail in Rev 20:7–10:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

For He must reign [*dei*] until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

Finally, Jesus must reign until He has abolished all rule and all authority and then He will deliver up the kingdom to the Father. As Busenitz explains:

Lastly, death itself will be destroyed (Rev 20:14). This is the final act of Christ's millennial reign. As the apostle Paul explained in 1 Cor 15:25–26, "He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death." Christ's kingly dominion during the millennial age will culminate in the destruction of death itself. According to 1 Cor 15:28, after all the enemies are defeated and His mediatorial role is fulfilled, Christ will then subject His kingdom to the Father "so that God may be all." Though the millennial kingdom will come to an end, the Son of God will continue to rule with His Father in Trinitarian glory for all eternity (cf. Rev 22:3–5).<sup>59</sup>

In addition to the other reasons, Satan must be released to deceive the nations and bring about not only the final rebellion, but also the final deaths of all humans who reject the Messiah. Further, God's promise "to curse the ones who curse you" actually relates to all enemies of Israel and not only to the Gentile nations. In keeping with God's Word, God curses Satan and throws him into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10). Then when death has been abolished forever and after the Great White Throne judgment of the eternally damned (Rev 20:11–15), when all evil will have been divinely eradicated, then the new heavens and new earth—and New Jerusalem—will arrive.

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<sup>59</sup> Nathan Busenitz, "The Kingdom of God and the Eternal State," *MSJ* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 260.

### Summary and Significance

In Revelation 20, God will act precisely as one would expect Him to if one reads His covenant promises in a literal, normative understanding. There is nothing bizarre or abnormal in anything that God will do in Revelation 20, for He has repeatedly promised to do these things. Revelation 20 is merely the final setting of God's faithfulness and the summing up of all things in Christ which He has been so faithfully doing from Genesis 1 onward until ushering in the eternal state.

Simply stated, while in full agreement with other reasons, including the sovereignty of God, the depravity of man, and Satan's utter wickedness, another extremely important reason exists: Satan must be released so that God can demonstrate to Israel and to the world the veracity of His covenant promises, completely and precisely fulfilling them in minute and specific details—all the way to the arrival of the eternal state. During the millennial kingdom, with the Abrahamic Covenant promises still in effect, God will still curse the ones who curse Israel and His Messiah (Gen 12:3; Num 24:9). As part of the Davidic Covenant and Messiah's reign, "there shall be no end to peace" (Isa 9:7); consequently, no final battle occurs in Rev 20:7–9, only the assemblage for battle, because an actual battle would disturb Messiah's peace and promises. With the fullness of the New Covenant in force, Jerusalem will again be rebuilt for the LORD and will be holy to the LORD, and Jerusalem "shall not be plucked up or overthrown any more forever" (Jer 31:38–40). After this final rebellion and God has completed *all* of His covenant promises, God will vanquish the assembled enemies before the battle begins—just as would be expected based on God's previous promises. Then "comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God and the Father after He has abolished all rule and all power and authority" (1 Cor 15:24). For indeed "He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet" (1 Cor 15:25), including the last human deaths ever recorded in Scripture (Rev 20:8–9), for "the last enemy that will be abolished is death" (1 Cor 15:26). Finally, Jesus will judge Satan, the last spiritual enemy who likewise cursed Israel (Rev 20:10). Once this transpires, no enemies of God play any future role. After the Great White Throne judgment (Rev 20:11–15) comes the wonderful perfection of the new heavens and earth (Revelation 21–22).

Reading the text in this "normative way" makes perfect sense unless one has a theological predisposition against it. Thomas' summation is helpful:

With this characteristic of the book as a whole in mind, for someone to say "that Rev 20:1–10 cannot be linked textually with Israel's covenants and promises; and that no New Testament passage clearly teaches a future Jewish millennium; and that the New Testament interprets imagery of the Old Testament with a reference to the present spiritual reign of Christ from his heavenly throne" is clearly a denial of what is obvious because of adopting meanings other than what the words have in their normal usage. It is to view those verses completely divorced from their context, an exegetically unacceptable decision. God will fulfil in a literal manner all the promises He has made to national Israel and will retain



His eternal attribute of faithfulness. The Apocalypse interpreted literally verifies His compliance with His promises to the nation.<sup>60</sup>

After all, “God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will he not make it good” (Num 23:19)?

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas, “Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse,” 48–49. Thomas quotes Waltke, “A Response” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, 353.