

# THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the  
21st-Century Church

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## Go Deeper Excursus 17 Revelation 19:11–20:10 as a Single Progressive Vision<sup>1</sup>

Over the centuries, interpreters have attempted to identify the subjects of the third-person plural verb ἐκάθισαν (“they sat”) in Revelation 20:4. The problem is, the aorist indicative verb seems to have no clear antecedent in the preceding immediate context. There it sits, a subjectless verb describing a clear action by unclear actors and providing a grammatical and syntactical puzzle. The puzzle would be nothing more than an exegetical curiosity were its theological implications not so important. Depending on how one identifies the subject of ἐκάθισαν, the result can mean the difference between an amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 or a premillennial interpretation. This pivotal passage can easily become a lightning rod for theological controversy. Therefore, the exegetical, grammatical, and syntactical issues must be addressed in order to determine whether Revelation 19 and 20 constitute a single progressive vision (premillennialism) or two separate visions (amillennialism).

To this end, I present the case that the subject of “and they sat” (καὶ ἐκάθισαν) in Revelation 20:4 is found in an anaphoric reference to Christ and the armies of heaven mentioned in Revelation 19:14, 19. The referent of the imbedded pronominal subject of ἐκάθισαν is what may be called a “remote visionary antecedent” or, to coin a shorter term, a “prohoratic” antecedent.<sup>2</sup> Though this solution is not entirely novel,<sup>3</sup> it is often dismissed without discussion or simply ignored in

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<sup>1</sup> For this excursus, I am indebted to the cooperative work of Alan E. Kurschner regarding the subjects of ἐκάθισαν. Our joint efforts originally resulted in co-authoring a paper entitled, “Who Sat on the Thrones in Revelation 20:4? Ἐκάθισαν and Its Implications” (Paper Presented to the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, 17 Nov, 2021, Fort Worth, Texas). The same basic argument is included in “Appendix 2: The Identity of Those Seated on Thrones in Revelation 20:4,” in Alan E. Kurschner, *A Linguistic Approach to Revelation 19:11–20:6 and the Millennium Binding of Satan*, Linguistic Biblical Studies, vol. 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2022). My adaptation of his jointly authored work will inevitably include some language from Kurschner’s work as it became part of our co-authored essay, for which he has graciously granted permission. The details presented in this essay reflect my own views, not necessary those of Dr. Kurschner.

<sup>2</sup> That is, an antecedent found earlier (“pro”) in the same vision (“horasis”).

<sup>3</sup> Versions of this identification of the “throne-sitters” are expressed or suggested, sometimes only in passing, in Cf. T. B. Baines, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 2nd ed. (New York: Loizeaux Bros., 1911), Robert Govett, *Govett on*

exegetical and theological works. In the following pages, I will argue that alternative explanations of the referent to ἐκάθισαν fail to account for all the evidence, or they lead to unnecessarily complicated, improbable, and unparalleled arguments. In contrast, the solution presented here is simple, probable, and has a parallel later in the book of Revelation itself.

As far as translation goes, ἐκάθισαν itself is not difficult to parse or gloss. The aorist active indicative third-person plural from καθίζω simply means “they sat.” As a transitive, καθίζω would mean “to seat,” as an usher might seat a guest, or “to appoint,” as a church might install a leader.<sup>4</sup> However, in its intransitive use—as in Revelation 20:4—it simply means “to take a seated position, sit down.”<sup>5</sup>

From a purely lexical, grammatical, and syntactical perspective, Revelation 20:4 poses no real problems. The opening phrase, καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, can be translated as “and I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them.” Something like this is the standard rendering by numerous more literal translations.

“Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them.” (ASV)
“And I saw thrones; and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them.” (DARBY)
“And I saw seats; and <i>they sat</i> upon them; and judgment was given unto them.” (DRA)
“And I saw thrones, and <i>they sat</i> upon them, and judgment was given unto them.” (KJV)
“Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them.” (NASB)
“Then I saw thrones, where <i>they took their seats</i> , and on them was conferred the power to give judgment.” (NJB)
“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them.” (YLT)

Despite its success at faithfully rendering the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, a straightforward translation of Revelation 20:4 leaves a gaping interpretational hole for the average reader: who are “they” in the phrase “and they sat on them”? This has led to a number of paraphrastic or less literal translations.

“I saw thrones, and sitting on those thrones were the ones who had been given the right to judge.” (CEV)
“Then I saw thrones, and people seated on them who were given authority to judge.” (CSB)
“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.” (ESV)
“Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those who had been given authority to judge.” (NET)
“I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.” (NIV)
“Then I saw thrones, and the people sitting on them had been given the authority to judge.” (NLT)
“Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge.” (NRSV)
“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed.” (RSV)

*Revelation*, vol. 2 (Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle, 1981), 265; 232; David J. MacLeod, *Seven Last Things: An Exposition of Revelation 19–21* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 141–142; Francisco Javier Ruiz-Ortiz, “‘Battle Is Over, Raise We the Cry of Victory’ . Study of Revelation 19:11–21,” *Isidorianum* 29.2 (2020): 41; Joseph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, vol. 3, 9th ed. (New York: Cook, 1906), 299–300; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 413–414.

<sup>4</sup> BDAG, 491–92.

<sup>5</sup> BDAG, 492.

These less-literal translations render the otherwise simple aorist active indicative ἐκάθισαν in a way that masks the understood third-person plural pronoun.<sup>6</sup> In these imprecise translations, readers are never left to wonder “Who are ‘they?’” because “they” has disappeared. We will return to the problem of this translation strategy later. Of greater concern for now are the attempts by exegetes to make sense of the embedded pronoun lacking an immediate referent.

After dismissing the suggestion that those sitting on the thrones are the twenty-four elders from Revelation 4:4 and 11:16,<sup>7</sup> Boxall argues that they are actually the souls of the beheaded martyrs mentioned in a subsequent clause later in the verse. He then takes the καὶ epexegetically and links the imagery of the passage to Daniel 7:9–27.<sup>8</sup> However, granting a likely mirroring of the imagery in Daniel 7,<sup>9</sup> this interpretation does not consider the natural meaning of the aorist active indicative, nor does it consider the possibility of a prohoratic antecedent.

Stephen Smalley notes, “The prophet-seer does not specify the identity of those who are ‘seated on thrones’; nor are the subjects in any part of this scene mentioned by name.”<sup>10</sup> However, he continues to interpret this group as referring “broadly to the faithful saints of God” and views them as the ones who are “priests of God” who “reign with Christ.”<sup>11</sup> In short, with the absence of a subject for ἐκάθισαν, Smalley simply provides a reasonable theological definition of “they.”

Grant Osborne, commenting on the question of the missing subject, notes, “The text never states the answer clearly.”<sup>12</sup> By “text,” he is referring to the major section he marks out in his commentary, starting at the break between chapters 19 and 20. He does not give a reason why he establishes a major section starting at 20:1 in the outline of his commentary.<sup>13</sup> He goes on to give

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<sup>6</sup> Bratcher and Hatton note, “*Seated on them*: this translates the third person plural active ‘they sat on them,’ the equivalent in the Greek of an impersonal passive. Another way to state this is ‘The ones sitting on them’” (Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series [New York: United Bible Societies, 1993], 287).

<sup>7</sup> That the occupants of the thrones are the twenty-four elders is a standard view among commentators. See Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, International Theological Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2018), 311; Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: Pickering & Inglis, c. 1900), 400.

<sup>8</sup> Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2006), 283. Cf. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Black, 1966), 252–253; Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh!*, ed. and rev. by Homer C. Hoeksema (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), 646; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 579; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 222–23. Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies 487 (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 195–196.

<sup>9</sup> There is little doubt that the imagery of Dan 7:9 and 7:22 serves as a background to Rev 20:4. See Henry Barclay Swete et al., ed., *The Apocalypse of John*, 2nd. ed., Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 258. However, the language describing the vision in Rev 20:4 must be regarded in its own context before appeal is made to Old Testament parallels.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 505.

<sup>11</sup> Smalley, *Revelation*, 505–6.

<sup>12</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 703.

<sup>13</sup> He entitles his section in his commentary as: “C. The Thousand-Year Reign of Christ and Final Destruction of Satan (20:1–10)”, while the previous section is entitled “B. Final Victory: The End of the Evil Empire at the Parousia (19:6–21)” (Osborne, *Revelation*, 696). It is surprising that he would disconnect 20:1–10 from chapter 19, because he

three possible options for the referent to ἐκάθισαν: (1) the twenty-four elders as the heavenly tribunal, (2) victorious martyrs, and (3) all saints including the martyrs as a special subgroup.<sup>14</sup> He does not consider a prohoratic antecedent.

Peter Williamson does not address the question, except for a footnote, stating: “Another way of translating this phrase is ‘and they sat on them.’”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Leon Morris notes, “John does not say how many thrones there were *nor who sat on them*.”<sup>16</sup> Craig Koester believes the identity of those sitting on thrones must be “inferred.”<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, he thinks it refers to all the faithful with the resurrected martyrs as a subset of the faithful; however, he likewise fails to address the problem of the active indicative of ἐκάθισαν.<sup>18</sup>

Greg Beale prefers identifying them as exalted believers with angelic judges, with a focus on the saints.<sup>19</sup> But he fails to address the active indicative grammar of ἐκάθισαν, which is surprising, since he gives a substantial amount of attention to the question of the identity of those who sit on the thrones in 20:4.<sup>20</sup>

Sam Storms, in his defense of an amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20, discusses several potential identifications of what he calls “the anonymous throne-sitters.”<sup>21</sup> These include: the “heavenly court” mentioned in Daniel 7:9–10, either synonymous with those given authority to judge or distinct from them; the Triune God; the twelve apostles; the twenty-four elders; saints from all ages, including the martyrs; saints distinct from the following “confessors” who suffered persecution but not martyrdom; or, his own view, a “summary or opening synopsis of the vision, with the remainder of 20:4 functioning as an elaboration or more detailed analysis of who sat on the thrones, why, and what it means for them.”<sup>22</sup> Storms makes no mention of a possible prohoratic antecedent in Revelation 19, a view with published adherents,<sup>23</sup> even though he mentions they could be “the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” a view for which I have been unable to

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interprets it from a premillennial framework. This may reveal how ingrained the commentary tradition has been on this assumed section break.

<sup>14</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 703–4.

<sup>15</sup> Peter S. Williamson, *Revelation*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 323.

<sup>16</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 230 (emphasis mine). To be sure, Morris does rightly think that it is those who will co-reign with him in the kingdom. But with so many commentators, the glaring issue of the active indicative ἐκάθισαν is given superficial treatment or ignored altogether, let alone given a meaningful consideration of a possible anaphoric referent in Rev 19.

<sup>17</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Translation ed., The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 771.

<sup>18</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 771.

<sup>19</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 996.

<sup>20</sup> Beale, *Revelation*, 995–1002.

<sup>21</sup> Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 471.

<sup>22</sup> Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 471–74.

<sup>23</sup> See note 3 above.

find any published proponents.<sup>24</sup>

Pivoting to more technical grammatical and syntactical considerations,<sup>25</sup> David Aune urges, “This is an example of the impersonal use of the third-person plural,” though he concedes that “the use of the finite verb ἐκάθισαν here, instead of an expected subordinate participial form, is an example of the author’s tendency to favor parataxis over hypotaxis.”<sup>26</sup> After these remarks, Aune surveys the standard interpretations: the twenty-four elders, the entire church, and the resurrected martyrs: “The solution to identifying those seated on the thrones in v4a is clear once vv4–6 are recognized as a single (though extremely difficult) textual unit that focuses on the theme of ‘the first resurrection,’ mentioned near the conclusion in v5b.”<sup>27</sup>

The grammarian Gerard Mussies notes that the third-person plural “may have a more general aspect of meaning, which can best be rendered by the indefinite pronoun”; he then mentions Revelation 12:6 (τρέφωσιν), 2:24 (λέγουσιν), and 18:14 (εὐρήσουσιν), along with 20:4.<sup>28</sup> Though the third-person plural is sometimes used in Revelation in this general sense, in those instances, the context indicates that the referents are general, not particular, and that those general referents play no active role in the proceeding narrative.<sup>29</sup> The instance of the third-person plural in 20:4 is different in that the unknown referents of ἐκάθισαν stand at the center—not the periphery—of the action in John’s vision. And, as I will demonstrate, the subject of ἐκάθισαν is unknown only if one neglects a prohoratic antecedent. In light of this, ἐκάθισαν should not be rendered by the indefinite pronoun unless more plausible explanations are ruled out.

Aune also suggests that the order of the narrative “is not in proper temporal sequence, for John first sees the thrones and those seated on them, i.e., the souls of the martyrs who had been beheaded

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<sup>24</sup> Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 472. It seems most likely that Storms disregards the possibility of a prohoratic antecedent because he has already decided that Rev 19 and 20 are separate visions, in keeping with his amillennial eschatology.

<sup>25</sup> R. H. Charles rearranges the clauses of verse 4 and places the καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς at the end of the verse in order to “restore sanity to the text” (Robert Henry Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol. 2 [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920], 182–183). With Mounce, I find this strategy unnecessary (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 354–355). However, Charles’ attempted emendation does demonstrate the deep problems exegetes have explaining the subject to ἐκάθισαν in a way that is consistent with John’s normal style.

<sup>26</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52c (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 1084. Aune elaborates that this impersonal use of the third-person plural instead of the passive voice “occurs in Hebrew with some frequency (GKC § 144f)” and “can also be used with third-person masculine plural verbs and masculine plural participles in Aramaic (see Dan 4:22; Rosenthal, *Aramaic*, § 181) and third-person plural verbs in Syriac (R. D. Wilson, *Elements of Syriac Grammar* [New York: Scribner, 1891] § 122)... The same impersonal use of the third-person plural is reproduced literally in the LXX (Gen 29:2; 35:5; 41:14; 49:31; Esth 2:3)” (Aune *Revelation 17–22*, 1084).

<sup>27</sup> Aune, like virtually all commentators, demarcate their analysis to 20:1 for their outline/structure of the book (Aune *Revelation 17–22*, 1076).

<sup>28</sup> Gerard Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study in Biligualism*, NovTSup (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 231.

<sup>29</sup> Rev 12:6 says, “The woman...has a place there prepared by God, in order that they may nourish (τρέφωσιν) her”; 2:24 says, “But to the rest of you in Thyatira...who did not come to know ‘the deep things of Satan,’ as they say (λέγουσιν)”; and 18:14 has “all the luxuries and luminous are perished from you, and never will they find them (εὐρήσουσιν).”

and who had experienced the first resurrection, an instance of *hysteron-proteron*.<sup>30</sup> That is, Aune sees this as an example of John’s “tendency to describe *where* an individual or group of people sits before describing them (Rev 4:2, 4; 14:14; 20:11 [...]).”<sup>31</sup> However, there is a significant difference in comparing the instances of “sitting” that he cites with the instance in Revelation 20:4. In all those examples, the person or persons seated on the thrones are already seated when the vision opens, indicated by the middle participle καθήμενος or its plural form.<sup>32</sup> So, while John uses this device, Aune simply assumes ἐκάθισαν is functioning as a quasi-participle in keeping with his assertion that Revelation 20:4 is an example of the impersonal use of the third-person plural. Yet, the fact that John has established a consistent pattern of employing a participle to describe scenes in which the subjects are already seated when the vision opens argues against Aune’s assertion that the active indicative ἐκάθισαν has an equivalent function. The fact is that John uses participles, not indicatives, to picture a subject already sitting on a throne (Rev 6:16; 7:10; 7:15; 19:4; 21:5).<sup>33</sup>

Therefore—and this is a crucial point—John has demonstrated repeatedly throughout Revelation that when he intends to portray a scenario in which the subjects are already seated when the scene opens, he employs the more appropriate participle καθήμενος. This suggests that his deviation from the participle in Revelation 20:4 in favor of the active indicative ἐκάθισαν signals a different type of scenario, one in which the thrones first appear empty, and then the subjects of the verb are seen actively taking their seats rather than being already seated when the scene opens.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Aune, Revelation 17–22, 1084.

<sup>31</sup> Aune *Revelation 17–22*, 1085. James Resseguie also asserts that John uses the literary device *hysteron-proteron* (“last-first”) in Rev 20:4, where “John sees the thrones in 20:4 before he describes those who sit on the thrones” (James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009], 246). Even so, this does not explain John’s use of the active indicative ἐκάθισαν (“they sat”) instead of the participle καθήμενοι (“seated”) as in other instances of throne-sitting, which we will discuss below.

<sup>32</sup> See Rev 4:2, “At once I was in the spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with one seated (καθήμενος) on the throne”; Rev 4:4, “Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, and seated (καθήμενους) on the thrones are twenty-four elders, dressed in white robes, with golden crowns on their heads”; Rev 14:14, “Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on (καθήμενον) the cloud was one like the Son of Man”; Rev 20:11, “Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat (καθήμενον) on it.”

<sup>33</sup> We may also compare the visions of the first four seals, in which each rider is described with the present middle participle ὁ καθήμενος (6:2, 4, 5, 8). John saw the riders already sitting on the horses: “I looked, and behold, a white horse, and the one who sat (καθήμενος) on it...” In that vision, John uses a participle to portray a scene in which the rider is already sitting when the horse comes into view. He was not portraying a scene in which a horse first appears and then a rider mounts—which would have been more aptly portrayed with the use of an active indicative. More instances include Rev 9:17, where the substantive present middle participle τοὺς καθήμενους is used: “And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur . . .” We see the same in Rev 11:16: “Then the twenty-four elders who sit [καθήμενοι] on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God.”

<sup>34</sup> It is possible, though not provable, that the thrones are seen as vacant because they had previously been occupied by the beast and the kings of the earth, along with Satan and his demonic minions. That is, we are seeing here the eschatological regime change, in fulfillment of the declaration, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15). Yet this is not in the vision, and the last we saw the beast and the kings of the earth, they were gathered to make war (Rev 19:19).

Furthermore, after examining each of the 891 uses of the indicative in Revelation,<sup>35</sup> I am prepared to make the following assertions that have some bearing on the identification of the subject of ἐκάθισαν. First, John routinely employs the simple indicative mood to describe consecutive action. This does not mean that every time he uses the indicative he must be describing consecutive action, but it does suggest that a rendering of καὶ ἐκάθισαν as “and they sat” should be our first choice unless a compelling reason forces us to seek a different sense of the indicative. Second, for instances in which indicatives are used to describe events occurring in a vision, the verbs always have antecedents within the vision—either in the immediate clause itself or in a preceding context. Of course, following normal Greek convention, the subject may immediately follow the verb within the same clause. Yet in no instance have I found an indicative verb anticipating a clear subject appearing in a later clause. Again, this does not rule out the possibility that John may be doing just that in this one instance—anticipating the martyrs later in verse 4 as the subject of ἐκάθισαν. However, such an explanation should be sought only if an antecedent is actually lacking in the context.

These considerations based on an examination of the indicators in Revelation do not, of course, rule out the possibility that John is doing something unique in Revelation 20:4. I believe, however, that it should shift the burden of proof. That is, based on John’s typical use of indicatives, one would expect the subject of the verb ἐκάθισαν in Revelation 20:4 to be found either in the clause itself, in the preceding clause, or earlier in the same vision John was describing. Only after failing to find a reasonable antecedent should one resort to translating the verb as if it were a participle, rendering the subject with the impersonal pronoun “people,” or supplying the subject of the verb from a following rather than preceding context.

To this point, I have examined previous attempts at solving the puzzle of ἐκάθισαν. I have concluded that they tend to propose solutions that are certainly within the realm of plausibility, but they tend to be more complicated, less probable, or lack demonstratable parallels. In the next section, I will offer reasons why the third-person plural subject of ἐκάθισαν is the armies of heaven previously pictured in 19:14, 19—a prohoratic antecedent. This solution is simple, fits John’s typical use of the indicative, and has a demonstrable parallel in Revelation.

### **The Prohoratic Antecedent of Revelation 20:4**

The following considerations have led me to conclude that the referent of καὶ ἐκάθισαν (“and they sat”) in Revelation 20:4 is found in a prohoratic antecedent—that is, an antecedent found earlier in the same vision. I will demonstrate that this is the simplest explanation that accounts for all the evidence. It also enjoys an actual parallel in the book of Revelation itself.

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<sup>35</sup> According to a search of the morphologically tagged Greek text of NA28 in Logos Bible Software, 891 verbs in the indicative mood are present in 369 verses.

As I explained above, John consistently uses participles to describe conditions in which the subjects of the participles are pictured as already seated at the commencement of the scene. Also, John does not routinely use indicatives in Revelation that function as if they were participles. Simply put, John repeatedly demonstrates that he knew the difference between participles that mean “to be seated” and indicatives that mean “to take a seat.” In addition, indicative active verbs in Revelation do not cataphorically anticipate their subjects. In no case must the reader search for the subject of a verb later in the context. Thus the domain of the plural referent of ἐκάθισαν is most likely found in the immediate anaphoric context.

If we look back in the preceding text of the vision, the only possible plural referent would consist of τὰ στρατεύματα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, “the armies in heaven” led by Christ, the rider on the white horse (Rev 19:14, 19).<sup>36</sup> If we disregard the chapter break between Revelation 19 and 20, “Christ and the armies of heaven” is the simplest option presented by the immediate context as the subject of the indicative plural ἐκάθισαν.

One may object that this plural subject is too remote to serve as a viable antecedent. However, in the sprawling account of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21–22, John uses a simple indicative verb with a prohoratic antecedent much more remote than the example of 20:4. The opening words of chapter 22 read καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι (“and he showed me”). If we were to open to Revelation 22 and begin reading at that point, we would face precisely the same problem that we encountered in Revelation 20:4. The natural question is, “Who is ‘he’?”: that is, who is the referent of the third-person singular embedded pronoun? To answer this question, we must work backward into chapter 21, past the obscure ὁ λαλῶν μετ’ ἐμοῦ in 21:15, all the way back to 21:9, where John’s companion is first identified as “one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls.” This antecedent is found a full thirteen verses earlier, on the other side of a chapter break, with extensive description intervening (21:10–27).<sup>37</sup> The verb ἔδειξεν in Revelation 22:1 has a prohoratic antecedent even more remote than the “armies of heaven” antecedent from ἐκάθισαν in Revelation 20:4, which is only eight verses removed from its antecedent.

Recognizing that many readers can be puzzled by the apparently subjectless verb at the

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<sup>36</sup> The second instance of this referent is reduced to the singular form in 19:19: μετὰ τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ, either because (1) it is elliptical, as it also omits the deictic ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, (2) the singular neuter form is functioning as a collective noun, or (3) just as the plural form of στρατεύματα is modified by the plural pronoun αὐτῶν (the beast and kings) in 19:19, the singular στρατεύματος is modified by the singular pronoun αὐτοῦ (Christ) in 19:19.

<sup>37</sup> The account of the angelic guide begins, “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb’” (Rev 21:9). Next follows a lengthy, detailed description of John’s guided tour of the New Jerusalem, the “wife of the Lamb.” Verse 10 begins, καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με... καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι (“and he carried me away...and he showed me”)—the antecedent of the understood “he” being without doubt the interpreting angel, as he is the only figure in the vision besides John. In the following four verses, John describes the brilliance of the heavenly Jerusalem (21:11–14). Then verse 15 cuts back to the angel with a participle, καὶ ὁ λαλῶν μετ’ ἐμοῦ (“And the one speaking with me...”), describing the angel’s activity in measuring the city. What follows is a sustained, complex description of the city, including its precise measurements and the ornate materials used in its construction (21:15–21). John then observes the divine source of the city’s glorious illumination and delimits those who have access to this eschatological haven (21:22–27). This concludes the chapter, but the vision itself continues.



beginning of Revelation 22:1, several English translations supply the word *angel* in place of the imbedded third-person singular pronoun. The NIV, for instance, translates 22:1 as “Then the angel showed me.” Some translations include a footnote clarifying that the Greek simply has “he” (e.g., ESV, NRSV). The NET Bible includes an explanation: “The referent (the angel mentioned in 21:9, 15) has been specified in the translation for clarity.”<sup>38</sup> In Revelation 22:1, the distance between the original mention of the angel in the vision, as well as the arbitrary chapter break in the midst of the vision, contribute to the potential confusion about the referent to the verb ἔδειξεν. Of course, if we were to assume wrongly that Revelation 22:1 begins a completely new vision detached from the narrative description begun in 21:9, we would find ourselves in exactly the same predicament many commentators find themselves in the case of ἐκάθισαν in Revelation 20:4. Yet in both cases, the problem of the missing referent is simply and satisfactorily resolved if we recognize that the suspected subjectless verbs merely continue the narrative within a single progressive vision.

	<b>The Second Coming (Rev 19:11—20:15)</b>	<b>The New Creation (Rev 21:1—22:5)</b>
<b>Initial Reference</b>	Christ and the armies of heaven (19:11–16)	One of the angels with the seven vials (21:9)
<b>Intervening Action</b>	Destruction of the beast, false prophet, kings of the earth, their armies, and the binding of Satan (19:17–20:3)	The New Jerusalem, measurement and description of city’s materials, illumination, and residents (21:10–27)
<b>Subsequent Reference</b>	“And they sat (ἐκάθισαν)” (20:4)	“And he showed (ἔδειξεν)” (22:1)
<b>Remainder of Vision</b>	Reign of resurrected saints, release of Satan, Gog and Magog, final judgment (20:4–15)	Thrones of God and the Lamb, the river of life, the tree of life, eternal light, and eternal reign (22:1–5)

### The Victory and Judgment Narrative

If we ignore the chapter break between Revelation 19 and 20, then we observe a link between τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ (“his army”) (19:19) and καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτούς (“and I saw thrones, and they sat upon them”) (20:4). It should not be missed that all the material between these two referents to victorious participants describes the defeat of the adversaries of God: the kings of the earth and their armies (19:19), the beast and the false prophet (19:20–21), and the dragon (20:1–3). Here, we see a narrative pattern that begins with (1) the glorious arrival of the victorious righteous armies (19:11–18), continues with (2) the confrontation and defeat of the wicked earthly armies and their captains (19:19–20:3), and concludes with (3) the glorious enthronement of the victorious righteous armies (20:4).

If we bracket out the judgment unit (19:10–20:3), we see that after the reference to Christ and

<sup>38</sup> Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible*, 1st ed. (Biblical Studies Press, 2005). Note at Rev 22:1.

his heavenly army (19:19), the narrative picks up with those who sat on thrones (20:4): τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ...καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτούς (“And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against him who sat on the horse, and against his army . . . and I saw thrones, and they sat upon them” (19:19, cf. 19:14; 20:4).

If we consider this bracketed material as a description of Christ and his army’s victory over the wicked rulers of the world, then we may view the antecedent of ἐκάθισαν as literarily remote, but conceptually adjacent, to ἐκάθισαν. In other words, when we come across ἐκάθισαν, we would not expect to look for the antecedent in the unit on the judgment of the three adversaries (19:20—20:3) who are defeated in the narrative. Rather, we find “his armies” in 19:19 as not only the closest antecedent to which ἐκάθισαν could possibly refer in a passage portraying Christ’s victory and enthronement, but also the only antecedent remaining in the vision.

“Armies of Heaven”	“Sat”
τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ (19:19; cf. 19:14)	καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτούς (20:4)

Other elements of the text hold the sequence of events in Revelation 19:11—20:15 together as a single, progressive vision. The initial reference to the beast and false prophet positioned to rouse the kings and armies of the earth against Christ is seen in Revelation 19:19: “And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against him who sat on the horse, and against his army.” The scene is constructed to portray Christ and the armies of heaven descending to face the beast and his armies of the earth. In a previous vision, John described how the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet had lured the “kings from the east” across the Euphrates to assemble them at Har-Magedon for “the great day of God, the Almighty” (Rev 16:12–16). The intervening explanation mentions that the kings aligned with the beast will “wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with him are the called and chosen and faithful” (Rev 17:14).

With this background, readers are already set up to expect a dramatic showdown between these two armies, climaxing in a victory for Christ and the armies accompanying him. This is what we see in the vision of the second coming in Revelation 19. As described in Revelation 16:12–16, the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and the kings of the earth with their armies are all gathered against Christ and his armies. Then, in Revelation 19:11, heaven opens, and Christ—the King of kings and Lord of lords—descends with his army to wage a victorious war against the armies of wickedness (19:11–16). A heavenly angel summons the birds of the air to feast on the carnage, a sign of certain victory over the assembled earthly armies (19:17–19). The scene shifts to the capture of the beast and the false prophet, who are cast into the lake of fire (19:20). The rest of the kings of the earth and their armies are slain and left as carrion for the birds (19:21).

At this point, the only figures remaining in the unfolding vision are Christ and the armies of heaven and the dragon who had been giving power to the beast and false prophet (see Rev 13:1–2;

16:13). In the next scene, we see the fate of the dragon when he is seized, sentenced, and secured in the abyss (Rev 20:1–3). Without the capture and binding of Satan as part of the unfolding vision, the conquering work of Christ and his armies is left incomplete. The use of the semantically related *πιάζω* and *κρατέω* for the seizing of the beast/false prophet and dragon respectively,<sup>39</sup> as well as the same term *βάλλω* for casting them into the lake of fire (beast and false prophet) and abyss (dragon), suggest that John intended these judgment scenes to be read together, despite the misleading chapter break between 19 and 20.

The Capture of the Beast and the False Prophet	The Capture of the Dragon
And the beast was seized ( <i>πιάζω</i> ), and with him the false prophet. . . . These two were thrown ( <i>βάλλω</i> ) alive into the lake of fire. (Rev 19:20)	And he took hold of ( <i>κρατέω</i> ) the dragon . . . and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw ( <i>βάλλω</i> ) him into the abyss. (Rev 20:2–3)

Having cleared the eschatological battlefield of the beast, false prophet, wicked kings, earthly armies, and dragon, the only figures remaining in the vision are Christ with his heavenly army. Thus when Rev 20:4 begins, “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them,” the subject of the verb *ἐκάθισαν* would most naturally be understood as the only remaining group in the vision: Christ and the armies of heaven who were last mentioned in Revelation 19:19.

Yet the ultimate doom of the dragon still lingers in the background as unfinished business. Whereas the beast and false prophet were cast into the lake of fire (19:20), the dragon was merely cast into the abyss (Revelation 20:3). After Christ and his enthroned victors had reigned for some time, the dragon is briefly released and attempts another revolt, which is instantly quashed (20:7–9). The description of the devil’s ultimate doom provides corroborating evidence that Revelation 19:11–20:10 is appropriately viewed as a single vision.

When the dragon is finally cast into the lake of fire (20:10), we are reminded that the beast and false prophet are already there (*ὅπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης*). Some interpret this *ὅπου* clause as indicating that the beast and false prophet are cast into the lake of fire at the same time as the dragon.<sup>40</sup> However, John uses this kind of *ὅπου* phrase for circumstances already in place at the time of the new action (John 11:30; 12:1; 18:1; Rev 2:13; 11:8). To describe subjects or

<sup>39</sup> Louw and Nida list *πιάζω* (18.3) and *κρατέω* (18.6) in the same semantic subdomain, “grasp, hold” (L&N, 220).

<sup>40</sup> For instance, Storms writes, “The text literally reads: ‘and the devil, the one who deceives them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also the beast and false prophet, and they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.’ The NASB supplies the verb ‘are’ (Gk., *eisi*; the ESV renders it “were”), wrongly so in my opinion. The verb to be supplied should probably be ‘were cast’ (*eblethesan*) from 19:20. Thus the text would read: “and the devil . . . was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also [*hopou kai*; cf. 11:8 for a similar usage] the beast and false prophet **were cast** (*eblethesan*).” He concludes, “So, when were the beast and false prophet cast in? The answer would appear to be, at the conclusion of the war, when the devil himself was cast in. The three *jointly* instigated the Armageddon/Gog-Magog revolt and are therefore *jointly* cast into the lake of fire to be *jointly* tormented forever and ever” (Storms, *Kingdom Come*, 436).

objects of an action accompanying the primary subject or object, John instead uses μετά (John 19:18; Rev 2:22; 6:8; 12:9; 14:1; 19:20). Especially compare the description of the participants of the events in Revelation 19:20, the capturing of the beast and false prophet:

καὶ ἐπιάσθη τὸ θηρίον <b>καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ</b> ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης (Rev 19:10)	καὶ ὁ διάβολος...ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός καὶ θείου <b>ὅπου καὶ</b> τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης (Rev 20:10)
“And captured was the beast <b>and with him</b> the false prophet.”	“And the devil . . . was cast into the lake of fire and sulfur, <b>where also</b> the beast and false prophet...”

Had John written καὶ ὁ διάβολος...ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός καὶ θείου, **καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ** τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης (“and the devil . . . was cast into the lake of fire and sulfur, **and with him** the beast and the false prophet”), this would have clearly communicated that the beast and false prophet were also cast into the lake of fire at the same time as the devil in Revelation 20:10 (thus recapitulating the same event described in Rev 19:10). However, this is not what John wrote. The most straightforward reading of Revelation 20:10 sees the beast and false prophet already present in the lake of fire prior to the casting of the dragon to his ultimate doom. Because the beast and false prophet were described as cast into the lake of fire in 19:20, this corroborates the evidence for the connection between chapters 19 and 20, pointing to a single, unfolding vision in general chronological sequence.

### The Background of Daniel 7

Understanding Revelation 19–20 also corresponds well with the image of the destruction of the beast, the enthronement of the court, and the saints’ inheritance of the kingdom in the Son of Man vision in Daniel 7. In that vision, while the career of the dreadful fourth beast of the last days was at its peak (Dan 7:8), thrones were set in place (θρόνοι ἐτέθησαν), and the ancient of days took his seat (ἐκάθητο) (Dan 7:9 LXX). Then, “the court sat in judgment” (καὶ κριτήριον ἐκάθισε) and books were opened (7:10). This results in judgment of the monstrous little horn: “As I was looking, the beast was viciously killed (ἀπετυμpanίσθη) and its body destroyed (ἀπόλετο), and it was given over to burning by fire (εἰς καῦσιν πυρός)” (Dan 7:11 LXX).<sup>41</sup> Then after the destruction of the beast, “behold, upon the clouds of heaven, a being like a son of mankind came” (ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἦρχετο)” (Dan 7:13).

This imagery of the coming of the Son of Man is used to depict Christ’s second advent in the New Testament: “Look! He is coming with the clouds (ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν)” (Rev 1:7; cf. Matt 24:30, 26:64). The Son of Man receives from the Ancient One a kingdom that will never

<sup>41</sup> Translation from Rick Brannan, Ken M. Penner, et al., eds., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2012).

perish (Dan 7:14). In the interpretation of this vision, we are told that the “little horn” will wage war against the saints “until the ancient of days came and rendered judgment for the saints (τὴν κρίσιν ἔδοκε τοῦς ἁγίοις) of the most high. And the appointed time arrived and the saints possessed the kingdom (τὸ βασίλειον κατέσχον οἱ ἅγιοι)” (Dan 7:22 LXX).

Daniel 7:24–25 again rehearses the career of the coming wicked “king,” who will blaspheme the most high and wear out the holy ones for a period of a time, times, and half a time. Following this, “the trial will be established, and they will abolish his authority, and . . . utterly destroy him completely forever” (7:26). Then, after the judgment of that evil king, “the kingdom and the authority and the majesty of them, and the dominion of all under the kingdoms of heaven, he gave to the holy people (ἔδωκε λαῶ ἁγίῳ) of the most high to rule an everlasting kingdom” (Dan 7:27 LXX).

Revelation’s imagery of the coming of Christ and the resulting destruction of the beast, his false prophet, and the kings of the earth, along with the binding of Satan (Rev 19:11–20:3) corresponds with Daniel’s imagery of the destruction of the little horn of the final beast, along with his fellow rulers and their wicked kingdom (Dan 7:11–12; 20–26). Revelation’s following imagery of the enthronement of those of those to whom judgment was given (κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς) (Rev 20:4–6)—if it refers to Christ and the armies of heaven from Revelation 19—corresponds with Daniel’s climactic imagery of the Son of Man and the saints receiving the kingdom (Dan 7:13–14, 18, 22, 27). The close conceptual parallels between the imagery of Daniel 7 and Revelation 19–20 require the latter to constitute a single progressive vision rather than two separate visions.

<b>Imagery of Daniel</b>	<b>Imagery of Revelation</b>
The reign of the end-times king and his allies for a time, times, and half a time, waging war against the saints. (Dan 7:8, 11–12, 20–21, 23–25)	The reign of the end-times beast and his allies for forty-two months, waging war against the saints. (Rev 13:1–18; 16:10–16; 19:19)
The Ancient of Days and heavenly court sits and renders judgment against the end-times king. (Dan 7:9–11, 22, 26)	The judgment of the beast and his kingdom at the close of his reign, including the satanic force behind them. (Rev 16:10–16; 19:17–21; 20:1–3)
The kingdom is given to the Son of Man and the saints. (Dan 7:13–14, 18, 22, 26–27)	The kingdom is given to Christ and the saints. (Rev 20:4–6)

On what basis can we identify the “saints” or “holy ones” (ἅγιοι) of the most high pictured in Daniel (7:18, 21–22, 26–27) with the armies of heaven accompanying Christ at his return?<sup>42</sup> The

<sup>42</sup> The argument that the armies of heaven can only be angels because saints are described as a Bride earlier in the chapter (e.g., Morris, *Revelation*, 220, and others) fails to recognize that the vision of the marriage supper of the Lamb concludes with the exchange between the angel and John in Rev 19:9–10, and a new vision begins at 19:11. The compelling lexical evidence in my mind trumps the only apparent problem with using different symbols in different visions with the same referent. After all, Jesus is described as a Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes in Rev 5:6, still

armies are described as wearing “white, clean, fine linen.” This image is identical to the “white linen” of the bride of Christ described in Revelation 19:8 as “the righteous deeds of the saints (τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν). Furthermore, the armies accompanying Christ at his return are explicitly interpreted proleptically in Revelation 17:14. John’s interpreting angel describes the final battle of Armageddon and says, “They [the armies of the beast] will wage war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

This description of those accompanying Christ at his coming to destroy the armies of the beast are κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί. It is significant that the terms κλητός and ἐκλεκτός are used only here in Revelation. Elsewhere in the New Testament, they refer most commonly to believers.<sup>43</sup> The term πιστός is used eight times in Revelation: three times, it describes Christ (Rev 1:5; 3:14; 19:11); twice, it describes Christians (Rev 2:10, 13); and twice, it refers to the trustworthiness of the words of the prophecy of the revelation itself (Rev 21:5; 22:6). The other occurrence is here in Revelation 17:14. Given the lexical evidence, it seems rather clear that at least redeemed saints are in view in Revelation 17:14, accompanying Christ at his coming. Thus the host of riders in Revelation 19:11 are saints, corresponding with the saints who receive the kingdom in Daniel 7 (though this does not exclude the involvement of angels as well).<sup>44</sup>

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called the “Lamb” in 19:7–9, but appears as a rider on a white horse in 19:11ff., with no mention of the title “Lamb” again until 21:9, at which point the “bride, the wife of the Lamb” suddenly takes the form of a city (21:10ff.)!

<sup>43</sup> For κλητός (including individuals and groups), see Matt 22:14; Rom 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28; 1 Cor 1:1, 2, 24; Jude 1. For πιστός (excluding references to God or to Christ but including references in parables), see Matt 24:45; 25:21, 23; Luke 12:42; 16:10–12; 19:17; John 20:27; Acts 10:45; 16:1, 15, 1 Cor 4:2, 17; 7:25; 2 Cor 6:15; Gal 3:9; Eph 1:1; 6:21; Col 1:2; 4:7, 9; 1 Tim 1:12; 3:11; 4:3, 10, 12; 5:16; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:6; Heb 3:5; 1 Pet 1:21; 5:12; 3 John 5; Rev 2:10, 13. For ἐκλεκτός (excluding references to Christ), see Matt 22:24; 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 22, 27; Luke 18:7; Rom 8:33; 16:13; Col 3:12; 2 Tim 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; 2:9; 2 John 1, 13. Of all these instances, only ἐκλεκτός is used once to modify “angels” (1 Tim 5:21). However, angels are never described as κλητός or πιστός.

<sup>44</sup> Charles writes, “Quite clearly in 17:14 it is stated that the armies of the Lamb will be ‘the called and elect and faithful,’ a description which cannot be applied to angels” (Charles, *Revelation*, 2: 135). See also the careful analysis by Beale, *Revelation*, 960.