

## "THE MILLENNIUM"

### I. Introduction

- A. Revelation 20 is the only place in Scripture where the millennium is mentioned.
1. When the only explicit reference to a teaching is found in one of the most difficult books of the Bible, we really do need to look to the rest of Scripture to help us interpret it.
  2. What we do not want to do is develop an interpretation of this passage that is not well-informed by the rest of Scripture, and then use that interpretation as the lens through which we understand the rest of Scripture.
  3. One of the most basic rules of biblical interpretation is that the more clear passages should shed light on the less clear passages, not vice versa.
  4. As we will see in this sermon, there are a number of passages that can help us understand what Revelation 20 is about.
- B. Today, as we look at the first three verses of this chapter, we will focus on three things.
1. We will consider the key interpretive issues for this chapter.
  2. Then we will look at the meaning of the thousand years.
  3. And lastly, we will think through the meaning of the binding of Satan.

### II. Key Interpretive Issues

- A. As you may know, there are a variety of millennial views among Bible-believing Christians.
1. Probably the easiest way to summarize these views is to say that there are four main positions that fall into two overarching categories.
  2. One overarching category includes those who say that the second coming of Christ will take place *before* the thousand year period that is described in this passage.
  3. The two positions that fall into this first category are known as *historic* premillennialism and *dispensational* premillennialism.
  4. Historic premillennialists say that the millennium refers to a period after Christ's return when resurrected believers will reign with him over an earthly kingdom.
  5. Dispensational premillennialists say that the millennium refers to a period after Christ's return when he will reign over an earthly kingdom in Israel while the raptured church dwells in a heavenly new Jerusalem.
  6. I want to point out that while the dispensational position is the one that is most widely held by Christians today, it is also the position that has the weakest biblical and historical support.
  7. It is shaped by the conviction that there is a sharp distinction between ethnic Israel and the church.
  8. The problem with this is that, as we have noted all throughout our study of Revelation, the church is consistently presented as the fruition of that all that was promised to Israel in the Old Testament.
- B. The other overarching category includes those who say that the second coming of Christ will take place *after* the thousand year period that is described in this passage.

1. The two positions that fall into this second category have been referred to as *golden age postmillennialism* and *amillennialism*.
  2. It should be noted that, up until fairly recently, amillennialism was simply known as postmillennialism.
  3. Golden age postmillennialists say that the millennium refers to a period prior to Christ's return when the church's influence will become so pervasive that Christ will reign over the entire world through his church.
  4. Amillennialists say that the millennium is a figurative reference to the age that we are in right now, during which the gospel is being spread throughout all nations as deceased saints reign with Christ in heaven.
  5. As I have previously indicated in this sermon series, I am convinced of the amillennial position, so that is the perspective from which I will handle Revelation 20.
- C. One of the most important consideration for the interpretation of Revelation 20 is the question of how it relates to Revelation 19.
1. Revelation 19 ends with a description of the second coming of Christ.
  2. Jesus appears as the rider on the white horse, and he comes to destroy his enemies.
  3. If Revelation 20 describes events that take place chronologically after Revelation 19, then one of the premillennial views must be correct.
  4. But there is overwhelming support for saying that these two chapters are describing the same event, so chapter 20 is not chronologically subsequent to chapter 19.

- D. The first thing to note is that there are a number of thematic parallels between these two chapters.
1. Both refer to the *reign* of Christ. (19:6; 20:4)
  2. Both contain pronouncements of *blessing* upon the saints. (19:9; 20:6)
  3. Both speak of believers as those who hold firm to “the testimony of Jesus.” (19:10; 20:4)
  4. Both depict the forces of evil gathering to make war against Christ and his church. (19:19; 20:7-8)
  5. Both draw upon the prophecy about Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38 and 39. (19:17-21; 20:8)
  6. Both have the forces of evil being cast into the lake of fire. (19:20; 20:10)
- E. Another important thing to point out is that the nations were utterly wiped out in chapter 19.
1. They were the main course eaten by the birds of the air in the gruesome “great supper of God.”
  2. This establishes that chapter 20 cannot take place after chapter 19.
  3. After all, chapter 20 refers to Satan deceiving the nations.
  4. If chapter 20 takes place after chapter 19, then there wouldn’t be any nations left for Satan to deceive.
- F. One other thing to note is that the basic components of chapter 20 are reflective of a pattern that we have seen repeated in Revelation’s previous visionary cycles.

1. We have seen Satan being cast down from heaven as a result of Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension.
2. We have seen a period of effective witness-bearing for God's people while the devil's influence is curbed.
3. We have seen this followed by a brief period of severe persecution for the church.
4. And we have seen this tribulation brought to an end by the second coming of Christ in judgment.
5. The fact that the same pattern is seen in Revelation 20 lend significant support for saying that this chapter is simply setting forth a more developed and definitive picture of the things that were depicted in the previous visions.

### III. The Thousand Years

- A. This brings us to the question of the nature of the thousand year period that is mentioned repeatedly in this chapter.
  1. As we have noted throughout this sermon series, numbers are consistently used in a symbolic manner in Revelation.
  2. For this reason, we should not think of the thousand years in a literal sense but in a symbolic sense.
  3. This is supported by the fact that the number 1,000 is used symbolically in many other places in Scripture.
  4. In the Pentateuch, the Lord is sometimes described as the God who shows steadfast love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. (Ex. 20:5-6; Deut. 7:9)
  5. In the Psalms, God is described as the owner of the cattle on a thousand hills (50:10), as the one of whom a day in his courts is better than a thousand elsewhere (84:10), and as the one in whose

sight a thousand years are but a watch in the night (90:4).

6. The number 1,000 is also used symbolically in numerous extra-biblical Jewish and Christian writings. (see Jubilees 23.27-30; 4.29-30; Epistle of Barnabas 15.4-5)
  7. These references establish that there is clear support for seeing the number 1,000 as symbolic.
- B. It should also be noted that one thousand is a multiple of ten, a number that stands for completeness in the book of Revelation.
1. Moreover, multiples of 1,000 are used symbolically in many places in Revelation.
  2. In chapter 5, the angelic hosts are said to number myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.
  3. In chapter 7, the number of the elect is symbolically represented as consisting of 12,000 from each of Israel's twelve tribes.
  4. And in chapter 9, the number of troops unleashed at the blowing of the sixth trumpet are twice ten thousand times ten thousand.
  5. In Revelation, the number 1,000 signifies a large number that is known to the Lord alone.
  6. This means the millennium is the period that extends between Christ's first and second comings.
  7. And during this period, all of those throughout the world who have been appointed to eternal life are being gathered and kept in Christ's kingdom.

#### IV. The Binding of Satan

- A. We turn now to the binding of Satan.

1. The chapter begins with John describing a vision in which he sees an angel come down from heaven, bind Satan, and lock him in the bottomless pit for a period of one thousand years.
  2. There are several earlier passages in Revelation that shed light on what this is about.
  3. At several points, the image of a key is used to stress Christ's sovereignty over the realm of death and over the forces of darkness. (1:18; 3:7; 9:1)
  4. One of these instances is in chapter 1, where Jesus tells John, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." (Rev 1:17–18 ESV)
  5. Another important parallel for the binding of Satan is found in chapter 12, where Jesus' resurrection results in Satan and his forces being cast down from heaven.
  6. These parallels indicate that the binding of Satan here in chapter 20 should be seen as describing something that took place as a result of Jesus' first coming.
  7. In other words, it is something that characterizes the entire church age.
  8. And as we will see in a few moments, the binding and imprisonment of Satan is not a matter of total restraint.
  9. Instead, it is a matter of being restrained from being able to do something that he was previously able to do.
- B. This interpretation is supported by parallels in numerous other passages of Scripture.
1. In Matthew 12, when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of casting out demons by Satan's power, Jesus says this: "if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?..."

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first *binds* the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house." (Matt 12:26–29 ESV)

2. Notice that the verb "bind" is used in that passage to describe something that is done to Satan.
  3. We see something similar in Luke 10, where Jesus responds to the report that his disciples give about the success of their mission by saying, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:18 ESV)
  4. Similarly, in John 12, as Jesus is speaking about his approaching death, he says, "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (John 12:31–32 ESV)
  5. The apostle Paul also says something along these lines in Colossians 2, telling us that through the cross God "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Christ]." (Col 2:15 ESV)
  6. In light of these parallels, it makes good sense to say that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 is describing the same thing that these other passages are describing.
  7. This is something that took place as a result of what Jesus accomplished at his first coming.
  8. It is descriptive of the time in which we are presently living.
- C. But how we can reconcile the idea of Satan being presently bound and locked up with the fact that Satan is still active in the world during this present age?



1. For one thing, we have to remember that this binding is not literal but symbolic.
2. It is referring to the same reality that the apostle Paul describes in 2 Thessalonians 2 when he says that the man of lawlessness (the antichrist) is presently being restrained, even though the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.
3. We also have to take note of the fact that verse 3 tells us what it is that Satan is no longer able to do.
4. The thing that the binding prevents him from doing is deceiving the nations, the Gentiles.
5. Now, of course, Satan is still deceiving people.
6. But he cannot deceive the nations, the Gentiles, in the way that he used to be able to deceive them.
7. Prior to Christ's first coming, Satan deceived the nations in a comprehensive manner.
8. Apart from the tiny nation of Israel (and only a fraction of them were true believers), the entire world population was cloaked in spiritual darkness.
9. But after Christ's ministry and after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the gospel is going forth and bearing fruit among all the nations of the world.
10. Here is William Hendriksen's summary: "Before the coming of Christ... salvation had been largely limited to the Jews. God had suffered Satan to blind the eyes of the nations, so that these nations walked in their own ways. A great change was about to take place. The 'truth' of the gospel would gradually replace the 'lie' of the devil. Satan is bound so that he can deceive the nations no more. Christ will draw 'all men' to himself. The chosen from every nation will be saved." [226]

- D. Satan is still active in the world today, but his influence is severely limited.
  - 1. He can still do a great deal of damage.
  - 2. A fierce dog that is bound by a strong chain can still inflict serious harm within the area to which it is confined.
  - 3. But the thing that Satan cannot do until his release at the end of this age is cloak the vast majority of the world in his deceptions.

## V. Conclusion

- A. Revelation 20 tells us why the gospel is making headway all throughout the nations.
- B. Satan has been bound.
- C. As Jesus said, the gates of Hades will not be able to prevail against his church.
- D. In the words of Anthony Hoekema, "Because of the binding of Satan during this present age, the nations cannot conquer the church, but the church is conquering the nations." [*The Bible and the Future*, 229]