

Revelation 20

1. Introduction and Overview

- a. There are four major sections in this chapter.
 - i. The Binding of Satan (vv. 1-3)
 - ii. The Millennium (vv. 4-6)
 - iii. The Last Battle and Defeat of Satan (vv. 7-10)
 - iv. The Great White Throne Judgment (vv. 11-15)
- b. Christians have taken different views on the nature of the Millennium and the order and sequence of these events (see explanation at the end of these notes).
 - i. Millennial views should not be a test of orthodoxy!
 - ii. Keep this issue in proper perspective! This is the only passage in the entire Bible that directly speaks of the Millennium.

2. The Binding of Satan (vv. 1-3)

- a. All agree that Satan is currently active in the world. Many verses of Scripture speak of Satan's activity during the present age.
 - i. 1 Peter 5:8
 - ii. 2 Corinthians 4:4
 - iii. James 4:4
- b. But Jesus also speaks about Satan being "bound" (same Greek work as in Revelation 20) during His earthly ministry.
 - i. Matthew 12:28-29
- c. Generally, the Bible speaks of the fact that Satan has already been *decisively* defeated, but he has not yet been *finally* defeated.
 - i. Luke 10:17-20
 - ii. Hebrews 2:14-15
 - iii. 1 John 3:8
- d. This understanding of Satan's progressive defeat harmonizes well with Revelation 20. Satan is already bound (Revelation 20:1-3), but he has not yet been thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:7-10).
- e. We should pay close attention to the purpose of this "binding" of Satan: "that he might not deceive the nations any longer" (v. 3).

- i. Satan is presently bound in the sense that he is no longer able to keep the nations in the darkness of paganism like he did before the first coming of Christ. Now the church is taking the light of the gospel to all the nations of the world (Matthew 28:18-20). The promise of the Abrahamic covenant is now being gradually fulfilled (Genesis 12:3; 22:18). God has made the nations Christ's heritage and the ends of the earth His possession (Psalm 2:8).
- ii. John 12:31-32 connects Christ's decisive defeat of Satan at His first coming with the salvation of a people from the nations. The ruler of this world is judged (Satan) → Christ is drawing all people (including Gentiles) to Himself!
- iii. The best way to think about this is to contrast the world before and after the first coming of Christ (Acts 17:30-31).
 - 1. Compared to the world before the first coming of Christ, God has greatly curtailed Satan's ability to keep the nations in his lies.

3. The Millennium (vv. 4-6)

- a. There are good reasons to believe that the Millennium is a description of the present reign of the saints in heaven (a *realized* millennium).
 - i. John sees "thrones" (v. 4). In Revelation, "thrones" are mostly in heaven (Rev. 1:4; 3:21; 4:2, 4; 7:9; 8:3; 11:16; 12:5, etc.). The "thrones" that are mentioned on earth belong to Satan (Rev. 2:13; 16:10). Revelation does indeed teach that saints shall "reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10), but the throne imagery seems to refer to heavenly rule, not earthly rule.
 - ii. Revelation has relied heavily on imagery from Daniel 7 where the Son of Man is coming with the clouds of heaven. In Daniel 7, the "thrones" are in heaven. See Daniel 7:9-10.
 - iii. John sees "souls" of those who come to life and reign with Christ (v. 4).
 - 1. Specifically, he sees the souls of those who had been beheaded (martyrs) and who had not worshipped the Beast (Rome) (v. 4).
 - 2. Souls coming to life more naturally refers to spiritual resurrection than physical resurrection.

- iv. There are two resurrections (spiritual then physical) in Revelation 20:5-6 which parallel the two resurrections in John 5:25-29.
- v. Like the rest of the numbers of Revelation, a thousand years is not intended to be a literal mathematical number. It simply refers to a long period of time.
 - 1. Think about other biblical expressions. God is faithful to a thousand generations (Deut. 7:9). God owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10). A day is like a thousand years (2 Pet. 3:8). None of those expressions is intended to be taken literally.
- b. The ESV translates Revelation 20:4 as if the saints are given authority to be judges. However, it technically says of these saints, “to whom judgment was given.” It is possible that this “judgment” is God’s legal decision to vindicate the martyrs in heaven. If this is so, Revelation 20:4 is God’s answer to Revelation 6:9-11.
- c. What does Revelation 20:5 mean when it speaks of “the rest of the dead” coming to life after the millennium?
 - i. Keith Matheson: “The first resurrection is the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20-23), and only those who are in Christ partake of this resurrection. Our participation in this first resurrection is spoken in the past tense in terms of regeneration, or spiritual resurrection (Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:12), and in the future tense in terms of our bodily resurrection (Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:23, 52-56; 1 Thess. 4:16). In other words, all who have been raised spiritually will be raised bodily. John also tells us that the second death, the lake of fire, has no power over those who have a part in the first resurrection (20:6, 14). In verse 5, John tells us that ‘the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.’ This ‘second resurrection’ specifically describes the raising of the dead who are not in Christ to be judged at the Great White Throne. This final judgment is described in detail in 20:11-15. John elsewhere refers to this resurrection as ‘a resurrection of judgment’ (John 5:28-29). The bodies of all men, believers and unbelievers, will be raised at this last hour, but there is a distinct difference in the nature of their resurrections. Unbelievers never

partake in any sense of the resurrection of Christ. They remain in a state of spiritual death until they are raised to face the second death. The bodily resurrection of believers, on the other hand, is referred to as ‘a resurrection of life’ (John 5:28-29).”

- d. The Beast (Rome) is killing Christians, but even though the Beast is killing the saints, they are reigning with Christ in the millennium!
- e. The emphasis is on the spiritual victory of Christ’s people.

4. The Last Battle and Defeat of Satan (vv. 7-10)

- a. Satan is released (unbound) at the end of the millennium (v. 7).
 - i. We were told previously that this is only “for a little while” (v. 3). Keep the contrast in mind: a thousand years of the saints reigning with Christ vs. “a little while” of Satan deceiving the nations again. This is not intended to convey that Satan will be victorious!
- b. This seems to depict a final conflict that is still future to us (v. 8).
 - i. Gog and Magog were OT enemies of God’s people (Ezekiel 38-39). If you read the account of them in Ezekiel, it is clearly referring to an ancient people, not modern geopolitical powers (like Russia). Speaking of Gog and Magog is a figurative way of speaking of great enemies coming against the Church.
 - ii. The enemies of God’s people are like the sand of the sea (v. 8).
 - 1. David Chilton: “The same hyperbolic image [is] used for the Canaanite nations conquered by Joshua (Josh. 11:4) and the Midianites overthrown by Gideon (Jud. 7:12)—two of the greatest triumphs in the history of the Covenant people. Rather than being a reason for panic or flight, the surrounding of the saints by a rebellious horde ‘like the sand of the sea’ is a signal that God’s people are about to be victorious, completely, and magnificently. God’s reason for bringing a vast multitude to fight against the Church is not in order to destroy the Church, but in order to bring the Church a speedier victory. Instead of God’s people having to seek out her enemies and engage them in combat one by one, God

allows Satan to incite them into concreted oppression, so that they may be finished off quickly, in one fell swoop.”

- iii. God allows these enemies to surround His people (v. 9), but He is simply bringing them close for a final victory. God is completely in control.
- iv. Fire comes down from heaven and consumes the Church’s enemies (v. 9-10).
 - 1. This fire seems to be associated with the final judgment at the Second Coming of Jesus, 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8).
- v. Note well what is taught in verse 10. Satan is thrown “where the Beast and False prophet were.” Satan shall eventually experience the same judgment that comes to all God’s enemies throughout history.
- c. This is a permanent judgment. They shall be “tormented day and night forever and ever” (v. 10).

5. The Great White Throne Judgment (vv. 11-15)

- a. This refers to the final judgment when Christ returns.
 - i. See Matthew 25:31-46
- b. The statement that “earth and sky fled away” (v. 11) is a likely reference to Psalm 114 about the terrifying presence of God.
- c. No one will be excluded from this judgment (“great and small,” v. 12).
 - i. Some believe that this is judgment of unbelievers only, but the language seems to be universal of all people.
- d. The text refers to “books” and “the book of life” (v. 12).
 - i. There seems to be a distinction here between believers and unbelievers. Unbelievers are judged according to what is in the books. They are under the covenant of works and judged accordingly.
 - ii. Believers, however, are delivered because their names are written in the book of life. Their works only have an evidential quality to them.
- e. The passage makes it clear that we are saved by grace, but we are judged by works (vv. 12, 13).
 - i. 2 Corinthians 5:10 makes it clear that believers also must give an account of our works to the Lord.

- ii. This should not frighten us because we are not under the covenant of works. Our Judge is also our Savior!
- iii. But our deeds matter because we will give an account for them.
- f. The “lake of fire” refers to the consummate state of eternal, conscious, torment for all unbelievers.

A Taxonomy of the Four Major Millennial Views

1. Dispensational (Pretribulational) Premillennialism

Christ comes *before* a future earthly millennium and *before* a future seven-year tribulation (the rapture).

Church Age	Rapture & Resurrection of Believers	Seven-Year Tribulation	Second Coming	Millennium	Resurrection of unbelievers	Final Judgment & New Heaven and Earth
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Proponents of this view-

John Nelson Darby (“the father of dispensationalism”), Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (Scofield Study Bible), Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles Caldwell Ryrie, John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, Hal Lindsey, Jack Van Impe, John Hagee, Tim Lahaye, Jerry B. Jenkins, John MacArthur.

2. Historic (Classical) Premillennialism

Christ comes *before* a future earthly millennium but *after* the tribulation.

Church Age & Tribulation	Second Coming & Resurrection of Believers	Millennium	Resurrection of unbelievers	Final Judgment & New Heaven and Earth
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Proponents of this view-

Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, W.J. Erdman, George Eldon Ladd, R.A. Torrey.

3. Amillennialism

Christ comes *after* the millennium where the millennium is understood as a symbolic picture of the entire church age or the present intermediate state.

Church Age Tribulation Millennium “This age”	Second Coming General Resurrection of Believers & Unbelievers Final Judgment New Heaven and Earth	Eternal State “The age to come”
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Proponents of this view-

St. Augustine (though some would place him under “postmillennialism”), Louis Berkhof, G.C. Berkouwer, William Hendrickson, Anthony A. Hoekema, Abraham Kuyper, Edward J. Young., Bruce K. Waltke, Jay E. Adams, Kim Riddlebarger.

4. Postmillennialism

Christ comes *after* the world has been largely Christianized through the power of the gospel. Some postmillennialists would agree with the amillennialist understanding of Revelation 20 above, but they would stress historical optimism for the spread of the gospel and the growth of the Church during the present period. Other postmillennialists would argue that the millennium of Revelation 20 refers to a “golden age” that is yet future.

Church Age	Millennium “Golden Age”	Second Coming General Resurrection of Believers & Unbelievers Final Judgment New Heaven and Earth	Eternal State
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Proponents of this view-

Athanasius, Eusebius, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Robert Lewis Dabney, A.A. Hodge, Charles Hodge, J.H. Thornwell, Augustus H. Strong, Greg Bahnsen, Iain Murray.