

The Thousand Years, Part 2: Further Considerations (Revelation 20)

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Introduction

1. As we noted last week, chapter 20 contains the most hotly debated six verses in Scripture because they speak of a *millennium* (Latin for the number 1000) (vv. 1–6).
 - a. Chapter 20 also deals with the binding of Satan, the first resurrection, and the final battle.
 - b. Three positions are taken on the bodily return of Christ and His rule over the nations: (1) premillennial, (2) postmillennial, and (3) amillennial.
2. As stated last week, we are going to examine this chapter carefully, using the best interpretation of it.
3. First, we will briefly examine the three positions on the text and an important interpretive principle that applies.

I. Positions Taken

1. The whole question of the millennium centers on five references (all in Rev. 20) to one thousand years with Christ and certain qualified souls reigning over the earth.
 - a. “*They* [souls of those who were (1) beheaded for Christ and those who (2) refused to worship the beast and receive his mark] *who came to life* [in the first resurrection] *and reigned with Christ for a thousand years*” (v. 4).
 - b. Revelation 20 opens with the binding of Satan in the abyss for 1000 years followed by his release for a short time (vv. 1, 2).
 - c. During this period of Satan’s incarceration, there is to be a resurrection of martyrs who are given thrones and authority to reign with Christ (v. 3).
2. The premillennial position holds that Jesus’ second coming (19:17–21) will *precede* this millennium in which He will raise the dead saints and rapture the living (1 Thess. 4:13–18) to enable them to rule with Him over the nations from Jerusalem (Psa. 2:5–9).
 - a. This is a literal reign over both saved and lost people.
 - b. The world will remain as it is except that Jesus will rule over all in absolute righteousness.
3. There are two *premillennial* views: (1) historic and (2) dispensational.
 - a. The difference between these two positions is defined by how each views Israel and the church. Dispensationalism holds that God has two separate and distinct programs—one for Israel and one for the church. Historic premillennialism usually takes the traditional reformed view that the church completes Israel.
 - b. Both, however, argue that their respective view is based on “the natural reading of Revelation 20:1–6” (George Eldon Ladd, *The Meaning of the Millennium, Four Views*, IVP, 1977, p. 17).
4. The postmillennial position holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended to all nations through the teaching and preaching of the Christian church.
 - a. This gospel expansion will Christianize the world.

- b. Present conditions remain essentially the same, but gospel work will suppress evil and allow for God's law to dominate gradually as cultures submit to biblical instruction.
 - c. This period will culminate with Christ's coming.
5. The amillennial position holds that Scripture does not teach a period of universal peace and righteousness before the end of the world.
- a. The kingdom of God is already present in the world as the victorious Christ rules by the Word and His Spirit.
 - b. Conditions of good and evil remain essentially the same, and Christians are called upon to suffer and endure for a testimony while the gospel is being preached to every nation.
 - c. The kingdom of God is spiritual in nature, but believers are looking forward to Christ's second coming when the kingdom will be gloriously established in a new heavens and a new earth.

II. A Crucial Principle

1. My journey in eschatology is very similar to that of Sam Storms (*Kingdom Come*, Mentor, 2013).
 - a. Scripture is clear concerning what will *end* or *begin* with the Lord's return to the earth. Sin, the corruption of the natural creation, and the experience of physical death will *end*. The glorification of the body and the inauguration of the new heavens and new earth will *begin*.
 - b. However, if you are a premillennialist, you must believe: (1) That physical death continues after His return, (2) That creation will continue to be subject to the curse of the fall even as Christ rules over all; (3) That the new heavens and new earth will not be established until a 1000 years after Christ's return, (4) That sinners can still be saved after Jesus returns to judge and punish the disobedient
 - c. The problem with believing these things is that the New Testament explicitly denies this order.
 - d. Revelation 20, properly interpreted, supports the amillennial position more strongly than any other position.
2. How we interpret Scripture is crucial to understanding the truth.
 - a. No Scripture should be interpreted so as to conflict with what is taught in any other text elsewhere.
 - b. No position should be taken using an obscure context that overrides doctrine established plainly by other texts.
 - c. These points are part of the crucial principle known as the *analogia fidei*—*the Analogy of Faith*.
3. In other words, “the premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 neither sheds light upon nor fills in but rather contradicts the assertions of other, decidedly more lucid prophetic passages” (Storms, p. 142).

III. I Cor. 15:22–28

1. Paul argues that Christ's resurrection is the power of life to all who are in Christ, for "*in Adam all [who are in Adam] die*" but "*in Christ all [who are in Christ] shall be made alive*" (v. 22).
 - a. There is, however, a chronological order. The physical resurrections of Christ and of those in Christ (v. 23) have a long interval (2000+ years).
 - b. The resurrection of those in Christ will take place "*at His coming.*" On this we are all agreed.
2. What Paul states as chronologically following the resurrection of believers is "*the end*" (v. 24; 1:7, 8).
 - a. What *the end* constitutes is also spelled out: Christ delivers up the kingdom to His father. Christ's kingdom (assumed already in existence) is then made the kingdom of God—at the *end*.
 - b. If this also takes place at the resurrection of the saints, where is the premillennial kingdom, which supposedly starts with the resurrection of the saints? It gets worse.
3. This delivery takes place only when Christ has destroyed "*every rule, authority, and power*" (see Eph. 1:20–23; Col. 1:13; 2:10, 15).
 - a. The last enemy to be destroyed is *death* (v. 26).
 - b. So, how can Christ destroy death at His second coming and death continue to thrive for another 1000 years?
 - c. For Paul, the *end* comes at Christ's second coming.

IV. I Cor. 15:50–57

1. A corrupt and perishable (flesh and blood) nature cannot participate in the incorruptible kingdom of God (v. 50).
 - a. This fact includes both living (flesh and blood) and dead (the perishable).
 - b. Thus, it is clearly argued, that the condition for any to inherit a place in God's kingdom, is that they must first be *glorified* (1 Thess. 4:13–18).
 - c. So, how can any flesh-and-blood persons be in Christ's Kingdom, as premillennialists presume?
2. The end of death is clearly scheduled for the time when the last trumpet is sounded and all the believers' bodies are transformed to become imperishable.
 - a. How can this be so if, at the return of Christ and the resurrection of the saints, death continues for another 1000 years?
 - b. Paul also quotes from Isaiah 25:8 that *death is forever swallowed up*, which also describes the time when God shall "*wipe away tears from their eyes*" (Rev. 21:4). That is clearly a reference to the new earth.

Application

1. We have shown but two of several Pauline texts, all of which allow for no 1000-year interregnum of Christ after His second coming with a period of peace and righteousness as both resurrected and living saints share earth with saved and unsaved people.
2. This clearly argues that Revelation 20:1–6 must be understood in light of Paul's clearer teaching and thus cannot mean what premillennialists assume.