

# Two Ages

## and the Present Reign of the Saints

### Part II

**Revelation 20:1** Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.

<sup>2</sup> And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,

<sup>3</sup> and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

<sup>4</sup> Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

<sup>5</sup> The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

(Rev 20:1-6)

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## Whatever You “Bind” and “Loose”

Last week, we began by thinking about two parallel passages in Matthew. In the first, Jesus tells Peter, “I will

give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and *whatever you bind* on earth shall be bound in heaven, and *whatever you loose* on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt 16:19). In the second, Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, *whatever you bind* on earth shall be bound in heaven, and *whatever you loose* on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt 18:18). Both passages are also **linked together** by the only two references to **the church** (*ekklesia*) in the four Gospels. In the first, Jesus says, “You are Peter, and on his rock I will build *my church*” (16:18). In the second he says, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to *the church*, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (18:17).

Last time, our focus was on the binding and loosing **as it related to Satan** in **Revelation 20:1-3**. We saw that the mighty Angel came down out of heaven with keys to the abyss and a chain. He seized the devil and bound him for a thousand years. This binding of Satan was closely related to the **binding of the strongman**, Beelzebul (another title for Satan), also found in Matthew. “**How can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?**” (Matt 12:29). Jesus’ point is that he is not casting out demons (i.e. binding them) by the power

of Beelzebul, but rather that he himself has bound Beelzebul and because of his omnipotent power to do this, he casts out demons of his own authority. The binding of Satan is thus **not a future prophecy and hope, but a real and present activity** of the power of God.

This was related to Matthew 16 when Jesus said, “**And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it**” (**Matt 16:18**). In other words, somehow Jesus is giving the keys of binding and loosing the devil *to his church*—now. And this is also seen in places like **the Great Commission** (again in Matthew) where Jesus says, “**All authority in heaven and on earth *has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations***” (**Matt 28:18-19**). This relates to the binding of Satan because making disciples of the nations, **the Gentiles**, means that Satan *no longer has the legal authority* hold them in captivity as he did prior to the First Coming of Jesus Christ. Hence, **Revelation 20:3** tells us specifically that the binding of Satan prevents him from “**deceiving the nations any longer.**” Thus, it is not an absolute binding that prevents him from doing anything, but rather one that legally allows Christ to build his church by bringing the Gospel to the heathen Gentiles, the turf of the gods of old, saving them, snatching them out of the evil kingdom, and putting them into his own.

Today, we are going to focus on **the second half of this binding of Satan story** as it is found in **Revelation 20:4-6**. The text says,

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

A lot of Christians believe this describes **the physical resurrection** of all the dead saints, whereby they come to life and reign with the physically returned Christ on earth during a future millennium. My view is that in it refers to the current reign of the saints with Christ this very moment and places like Matthew 18 demonstrate it. This does not mean there is no as of yet future aspect to this passage, but it does mean that there is **already something** crucially important that many Christians do not, but very much need to understand. To put it in a nutshell, if the binding of Satan

is a present reality, this must be too, for they both talk about the same time frame.

## **Two Age Eschatology and the Present Kingdom of Christ**

By way of background, if we were reading Revelation 20 in terms of its placement in the book called the Bible, we would realize quickly that this is the **third from last chapter in the entire book**. To put that in perspective, there are 1189 chapters in the Bible, and this is the 1187<sup>th</sup>. That puts 99.75% of the Bible in our rearview mirror. In other words, you can't expect to just open your Bible at this chapter and come to an understanding of it all by itself. The rest of the Scripture informs its meaning.

I want to discuss **three** important doctrines that come in the NT which must help us as we interpret what we are seeing. The first (we looked at this a couple of weeks ago) is what it means by "**the last days**." Many people think that Revelation 20 deals with the last days, by which they mean the "end times." But the NT is clear about when the last days begin. "**In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh**" (**Acts 2:17**). Peter preached these words from Joel 2 **at Pentecost**, that day when the Spirit literally was poured out upon 3000 people from all the nations. Peter was

saying that the last days begin *now*. Hebrews is the same. “*In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son*” (Heb 1:2). Again, the last days, biblically speaking, *has already begun*. This means that if Revelation 20 is about the Last Days, it already has its fulfillment, at least in part, behind us.

Second, I want to look at what the NT means by “*the age to come*.” Jesus speaks about the how the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven “*either in this age or in the age to come*” (Matt 12:32). Though the Bible mentions other ages, both in our past (Rom 16:25; Tit 1:2; Heb 9:26) and in our future (Eph 2:7), but for the sake of eschatology, these are the only two ages that matter to us.

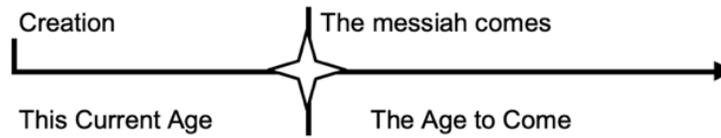
Many people have what I call a *one-dimensional view* of how these two-ages work. *Geerhardus Vos*, who wrote probably the seminal book on this in Reformed circles,<sup>1</sup> describes this as essentially a single line with a beginning at creation and at some point, the Second Coming which ushers in Eternity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Geerhardus Vos*, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1930; P&R 1994).

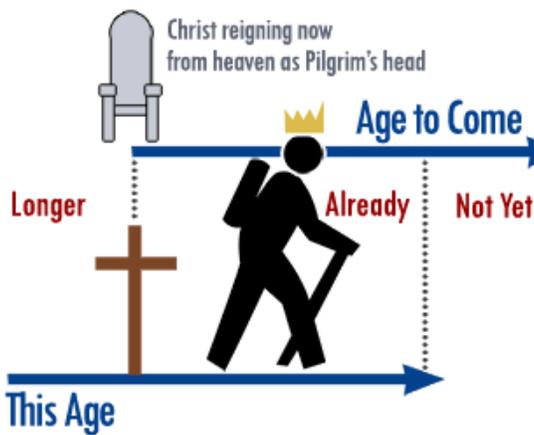
<sup>2</sup> Charts are redrawn by *Richard A. Davis* and come from Vos, 38 and *Anthony A. Hoekema*, *The bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979, 1994), 299. <https://amillennial.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Two-Age-Eschaton.pdf>. For another representation see *R. Lira*, “Two-Age Eschatology,” (12-26-11), <http://learningandlivingtheword.com/documents/twoagemodel.pdf>.

### A. The original scheme of thinking in the OT

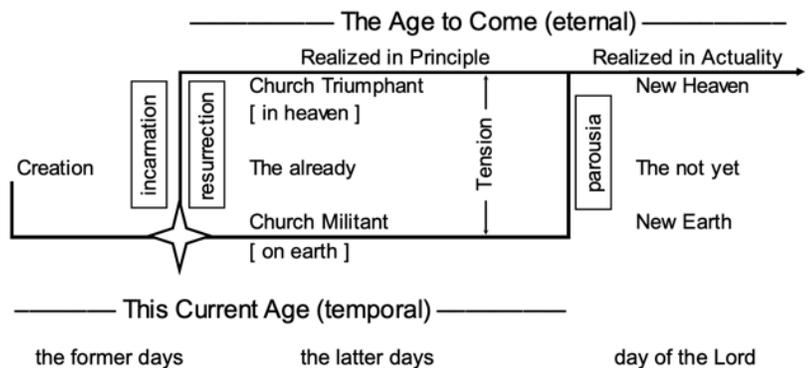


History is flat and one dimensional. At some moment in time, you move wholly out of one and wholly into the other. He suggests this is the vision of future eschatology that can be discerned from the OT. Many today continue to think about eschatology in this single dimension, with the age to come arriving not at the First Coming, but at the Second.

On the other hand, he argues that NT eschatology is two-dimensional:



### B. The view as modified by the first coming of Christ



History is two lines, not one. They overlap. This age begins at the fall and continues until the Second Coming. However, the age to come begins at the First Coming and

continues on into eternity. This second dimension creates a strange tension—an historical overlap between the two ages. We are in both ages right now.

“This age” is sometimes called “the present age” (1Tim 3:16) or more particularly, “the present evil age” (Gal 1:4). It is quantified by “flesh” (*sarx*)—that is since the Fall: transience, corruption, law, sin, rebellion, and death.<sup>3</sup> Both humanity and the supernatural entities have partaken of this age. On the other hand, the age to come is quantified by “spirit” (*pneuma*)—this is since the First Coming of Jesus Christ: permanence, eternity, resurrection, salvation, God, and life.

Though “the present age” and “age to come” language might lead you to think that the age-to-come must be only future, this is not the way the NT talks about it. Hebrews says it is possible to “taste the powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:5). How can you taste something that isn’t present? In Mark and Luke, Jesus identifies the age to come as “eternal life” (Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30). Yet in John he says, “Whoever believes in the Son has [present tense] eternal life” (John 3:36). How can you have something in the present that is not present? A very important passage for our

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<sup>3</sup> A good discussion of this is Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R 1978, 1987), 106ff.

purposes is **Eph 1:20-21**. Here, Paul tells us Christ is seated at the present “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” Yet, just a little while later he tells us that though we were dead in our trespasses, God “made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (**Eph 2:5-6**). This is not a future truth, but a present reality. Therefore, the age-to-come must somehow be here, now.

Vos and many others (it was the **Premillennialist** George Ladd who popularized this, meaning this is not just the view of Amillennialists) suggest that since both the present age and the age to come are somehow present, the two ages overlap and therefore we must not think of the two ages in one dimensional thinking. The age to come is primarily a **heavenly eternal reality that is intruding** upon our earthly time and space through the Holy Spirit and Christ’s church. It will last forever. It comes because of the work of Jesus Christ in his ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension and the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost. Yet, the present evil age, which began at the fall, also continues until the Second Coming when it comes to an end.

The way this is possible is because of Jesus' **Head-body analogy** and our **mystical union** with Christ. You and I are **in the present age** now because this is where our physical bodies are. However, you and I are **in the age to come** now because this is where our Head—Christ is. He is in heaven, and we are spiritually and positionally there with him. Those who have passed on in Christ are also literally there with him. This puts us in a strange tension of what has become known as “**the already-not yet.**” The head is in heavenly places; the body is in earthly places.

The **third thing** to bring up here is **the kingdom of God**. Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, “**Your kingdom come...**” And yet, Jesus commanded his disciples to go out and preach, “**The kingdom of heaven is at hand**” (**Matt 10:7**). Many Dispensationalists have understood that this proclamation which went first to the Jews was rejected by them and therefore God put the coming of the kingdom on hold. What came in its place was what they call “**the church age,**” something totally different from the kingdom of heaven, which will not actually come until the Millennium and the reign of the saints in **Revelation 20:4-6**.

However, this is not the NT's teaching on the subject. For example, in a passage we are now familiar with, Jesus

concludes his casting out of demons because he has bound the strongman, Satan, by saying, “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then *the kingdom of God has come upon you*” (Matt 12:28). Again, the Pharisees were sort of the Dispensationalists of their day, thinking that the kingdom of God would be this Golden Age Messianic Political Kingdom headquartered in Jerusalem. Jesus’ response was, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, *the kingdom of God is* [present tense] *in the midst of you*” (Luke 17:20). When? Right now.

He then goes on to tell many parables about the kingdom and how it is here (Matt 13:31ff; 33ff; 44; 45ff; 47ff; etc.). He has many sayings, such as people who are presently “the least in the kingdom” (Matt 11:11). He says that the Pharisees are present tense “shutting” the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces (Matt 23:13). Again, in a passage intimately related to the binding, Jesus tells Peter that he will give him the keys of “the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 16:19). Matthew 18, the parallel, demonstrates that this became a present reality. And of course after the Gospels, the Apostles talk much about the present kingdom (Acts 19:8; 28:31; Rom 14:17; Col 1:13; etc.). And so, in these three ways

(“last day,” “age to come,” and “kingdom of God/heaven”), we see that indeed, there is a present reality to that which many people think is only future.

## Two Age Eschatology and the Present Kingdom of Christ

With this as our NT background, I want to [turn to our passage](#) and continue investigating my 17 questions surrounding it.

1. Who is “the angel” that comes down out of heaven? (1)
2. What is “the key” that he holds? (1)
3. Where is the “bottomless pit?” (1)
4. What is the “chain”? (1)
5. What does it mean that “Satan” is seized? (2)
6. What does it mean to be bound? (2)
7. **How long is a thousand years? (2)**
8. What does it mean to seal and shut the pit? (3)
9. Why does it say, “so that he might not deceive the nations?” (3)
10. What does it mean that Satan will be released? (3)
11. **What are the thrones? (4)**
12. **Who are seated on them? (4)**
13. **Who are the “souls?” (4)**
14. **When and from where do they “reign with Christ?” (4, 6)**
15. **Who are “the rest of the dead” (5)**
16. **What is the “first resurrection?” (5, 6)**
17. What is the “second death?” (6)

## Question 7: How Long is the 1000 years?

After Satan is bound the text tells us that this is to last “a thousand years.” This number is found once in each of vv. 2-7. Each time it is used, it refers to the same period of time. It is not two different millenniums, but the same one. Therefore, if the binding of Satan for a thousand years is present, so also must the reign of the saints in vv. 4-6 be a present reality. But if the saints are not reigning presently, then Satan likewise cannot be bound. This is a main reason why we spent an entire week looking at why Satan has already been bound.

But how long is this thousand years? To a literalist, it seems obvious. “A thousand years is a thousand years, no more, no less.” But, of course, if Satan is presently bound, then this is impossible, for it has been nearly 2,000 since the binding. As we saw in our overview of Amillennialism, this phrase appears in a few other places in the Bible. It is always used symbolically.<sup>4</sup> “A thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday” (Ps 90:4). Peter repeats this Psalm substituting “a day” for “yesterday” (2Pet 3:8). This is very relevant, because the context is about the “day of judgment” (vs. 7),

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<sup>4</sup> Beale has a lengthy discussion on how the number is used symbolically in Jewish apocalyptic literature. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 1017-1021.

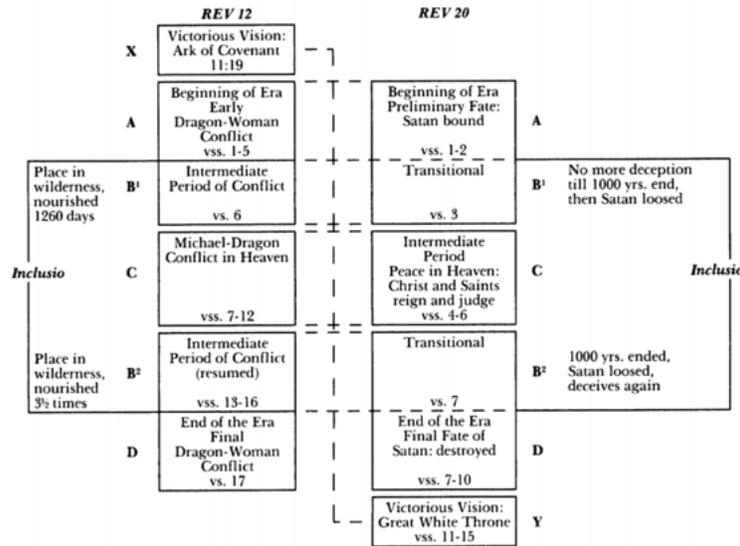
the “day of the Lord” which comes “as a thief” and then “the heavens will pass away with a roar” (vs. 10). Certainly, the totality of Revelation’s 1,000 years culminates in this very same thing (Rev 20:10-21:1).

But we should now also compare Revelation 11-12 and 20. This is important since Rev 12 and 20 are **chiastic parallels**:

Revelation 12 and 20 Parallels		
	Rev 12	Rev 20
<b>Heavenly Vision</b>	“A Great sign appeared in heaven” (1)	“I saw an angel coming down from heaven” (1)
<b>A Heavenly Conflict</b>	“Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon” (7)	“The angel ... seized the dragon” (1-2)
<b>Dragon Identified</b>	“The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (9)	“The dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan” (2)
<b>Dragon Thrown Down/ Loses Specific Role</b>	“The great dragon was thrown down” (9)	“And threw him into the abyss” (3)
<b>Results in Kingdom</b>	“Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom ... have come” (10)	“Then I saw the thrones ... and [they] reigned (4)
<b>Victory of Saints</b>	“They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (11)	“beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God ... They came to life and reigned with Christ (4)
<b>Endurance unto Death</b>	“They loved not their lives even unto death” (11)	“beheaded for the testimony of Jesus...” (4)
<b>Final War Against Saints</b>	“the dragon ... went off to make war on the rest of her offspring” (17)	The dragon loosed “to gather them for battle ... surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city” (9)
<b>War Thwarted</b>	“But the earth came to the help ... and opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth” (16)	“but fire came down from heaven and consumed them” (9) <sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This is an English version of a Greek chart I found online. See also **Beale**, *Revelation*, 992 for a slightly different chart.

DIAGRAM 1  
COMPARATIVE STRUCTURES—REVELATION 12 AND 20



Revelation 12 has its own timeframe, and as it is parallel with Rev 20, this number parallels the thousand years, literally speaking. It uses the number 1,260 days. “And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days” (Rev 12:6). It repeats this as “time, times, and half a time” (12:14), but this time the woman flees from the serpent to be nourished by God. They are parallel.

Rev 12:14	“time, times, and half a time”	The woman given two wings to flee from the serpent into the wilderness to be nourished for...
Rev 12:6	1,260 days	The women flees into the wilderness prepared by God to be nourished for...

“Time, times, and half a time” comes from Daniel where the little horn blasphemes the Most High and wears out the saints at the end of which period the shattering of the holy

people will finally come to an end as the divine council rules in their favor.

Dan 7:25	“time, times, and half a time”	Little horn <b>blasphemes</b> the Most High and <b>wears out the saints for...</b>
Dan 12:7	“time, times, and half a time”	Christ swears the vision is for the ending of the <b>shattering of the holy people</b> comes to an end

It is important to remember that these numbers in Rev 12 also parallel numbers in chs. 11-13. One of these numbers is **identical (11:3)**. Another, which is the same length, is stated **in months** rather than days (**11:2**). The number is 42 months. During this period, the beast blasphemes and has certain authority to persecute and trample the church:

Rev 13:5	42 months	<b>Beast</b> utterly <b>blasphemous</b> words and given authority for...
Rev 11:2	<b>42 months</b>	God’s “temple” and “holy city” given over to the <b>nations who trample them</b> for ... (during this time, see above, the two witnesses are working)

In the middle, we have a very short period: **3 ½ days**. Whether or not this is the same period of time from the perspective of a long vs. short way of looking at it, or they are different, together, these numbers are chiastic:

- A. 42 months, 11:2 (**3 ½** years, calculated in months)
- B. 1260 days, 11:3 (**3 ½** years, calculated in days)
- C. **3 ½** days, 11:9
- C'. 3 ½ days, 11:11
- B'. 1260 days, 12:6
- A'. 42 months, 13:520

What's so interesting is that  $3\frac{1}{2}$  is the root of all these numbers. Why? This number is **half of seven**, which in Daniel refers to the Seventieth Week of seventy years, each of which is composed of seven years. This seventieth week is where Dispensationalists get **the length of the Seven Year Great Tribulation**. Yet, in Daniel, the seventieth week is already **half-way over** at the crucifixion of Jesus when Christ makes a strong covenant (i.e. the new covenant) as he puts an end to sacrifice and offering (i.e. he dies a sacrificial death on the cross; **Dan 9:26-27**).<sup>6</sup>

I believe the two three-and-a-halves signify the fulness of the seventieth week in the following way. **The first  $3\frac{1}{2}$**  take us from Christ's baptism to his crucifixion/resurrection/ascension. This is a literal-physical  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years that corresponds to Jesus's earthly ministry. **The second  $3\frac{1}{2}$**  takes us from the end of the First Coming to the beginning of the Second Coming. This is the mystical-spiritual  $3\frac{1}{2}$  that corresponds to Christ's heavenly ministry. The first corresponds to this present age and the Head—which is Christ. The second corresponds to the age to come and the

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<sup>6</sup> Much of Dispensationalism gets this badly wrong, thinking it refers to the future Antichrist who makes a covenant with Israel rather than with Jesus Christ who makes a covenant at the cross. See **my sermon** "Dan 9:24-27: Antichrist or Jesus Christ?"

Body—which is Christ’s church. Sounds very much like our two-age overlap, doesn’t it?

But why would different numbers represent the same span of time? I suggested it is because of **perspective and the theology** they are conveying. The **months** tells us time according to the beast—**moon**-time, darkness. The **days** tells us time according to God—**sun**-time, light. Again, if chs. 12 and 20 indeed speak of the same thing, then the various 3 ½’s of the former are equal to the 1,000 years of the later. **Meredith Kline**, who has an excellent treatment of the reasons for the differences in the numbers,<sup>7</sup> summarizes the parallel this way, “**In Revelation 20, the long period (the thousand years) culminat[es] in a brief crisis [the “short time,” vs. 3]; in Revelation 12 ... the 3½ years of prophetic witness followed by the 3½ days crisis in Revelation 11:11.**”<sup>8</sup> Both follow the same pattern: long vs. short.

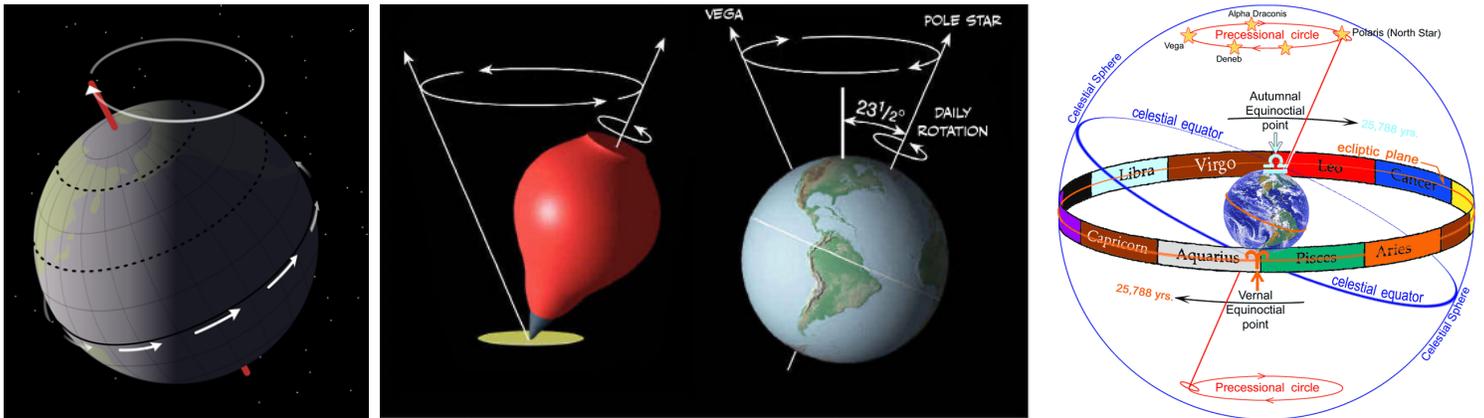
Why a thousand years though? (\*\*\*Note: The following is purely my own speculation.) I suspect there could be something going on with the number 1000 and the idea of an age, or as I put it here, the “age to come.” It is common for theologians to speak of “**the millennial age.**” The Greeks sometimes spoke of an age (*aion*) in term of The

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<sup>7</sup> **Meredith Kline**, *God Heaven and Har Magedon* (Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock, 2006), 165-179.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

**Great Year** or **The Platonic Year**.<sup>9</sup> Essentially, the Great Year refers to the 25,920 years it takes for the earth to complete one cycle of its long wobble on its axis (the earth's axis is not perfectly vertical, but like a wobbling top, which is why this occurs).<sup>10</sup> This is measured, ever so slowly, each equinox as the stars move fractions of a degree from the previous year. It takes 72 years for the earth to move just one degree as measured like this. This number comes from multiplying 72 x 360 (degrees).



Precession of the Earth. One Revolution = 25,920 Years.

If we divide the number by 12, we get approximately 2,160 years. We would do this because over the course of this super-long journey, the earth will travel exactly one time through the twelve constellations (see figure on right; yes, this returns us to those guys again). This 2,160 years

<sup>9</sup> *Timaeus* 39d. This is the same book where he discusses the many cataclysms that have occurred that have time and against destroyed civilization (see esp. 21-22).

<sup>10</sup> Technically, it appears to take 25,772 years. The Wiki "The Great Year," explains it well: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Year#cite\\_note-Cruttenden-3](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Year#cite_note-Cruttenden-3).

gives us what is called a **Platonic Month**. Platonic Months are what the Greeks sometimes called “ages.”<sup>11</sup> Figuratively speaking, we could call them 12 millennial ages.

You’ve probably heard the song, “**Age of Aquarius**” (1969) by the *Fifth Dimension*. This song sings of the coming Platonic Month when the sun will rise in this constellation on the equinox. Curiously, we’ve been in the **Age of Pisces** since the birth of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Pisces is the Fish. This was an idea so well understood that the early Christians made the sign of the fish as their informal logo and the ICHTHUS, an acrostic (*Iesous Chreistos Theou Huios Soter Stauros*) meaning “**Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior, Cross.**” It was very popular and still is (you’ve seen it on bumper stickers).<sup>13</sup> Some suggest this is why Jesus called his disciples “**fishers of men**” (**Mt 4:19; Mark 1:17**),<sup>14</sup> why early Christians were

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion see **David Fideler**, *Jesus Christ Sun of God: Ancient Cosmology and Early Christian Symbolism* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1993), 160ff. Also the Wiki: “Astrological Age,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrological\\_age#Timeframes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astrological_age#Timeframes). The classic study of this is **Giorgio De Santillana and Hertha Von Dechend**, *Hamlet’s Mill: An Essay Investigating The Origins of Human Knowledge and Its Transmission Through Myth* (Boston: David R Godine, 1969). According to Jewish tradition, the origins of this knowledge come from the Watchers (1En 8:3; 69:16-21). Fideler cites *In Search of Ancient Astronomies*, ed. **E. C. Krupp** (Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1977), esp. 218-19.

<sup>12</sup> Astronomers calculate it anywhere from 68 BC to the birth of Christ. **Bruce McClure**, “When Will The Age of Aquarius Begin?” *EarthSky* (Jan 8, 2021), <https://earthsky.org/human-world/when-will-the-age-of-aquarius-begin/>.

<sup>13</sup> For example, see **Sibylline Oracle 8** as an appendix to my sermon on Psalm 9-10. **Tertullian**, *On Baptism* 1; **Augustine**, *City of God* 18.23.

<sup>14</sup> **Ambrose**, *Letter 7*.

called “**little fishes**,”<sup>15</sup> why Christians greeted each other in secret with the sign of the fish,<sup>16</sup> why Christians put the fish on their tombstones,<sup>17</sup> and baptismals were known as “**fish ponds**” (*piscina*).<sup>18</sup>

Curiously, Pisces is **the twelfth and final constellation** in the 360° circle.<sup>19</sup> To put it in technically incorrect, but helpful year terms, it’s beginning would be like being in Dec 1 and its ending would be like Dec 31 of the Great Year. Curiously, the majority of astronomers suggest that it has ended, that we are now in the age of Aquarius, and this started, get this, on Dec 25<sup>th</sup> 2012.<sup>20</sup> To put it another way,

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<sup>15</sup> “But we, little fishes, after the example of our ICHTHUS Jesus Christ, are born in water” (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 1).

<sup>16</sup> “According to one ancient story, when a Christian met a stranger in the road, the Christian sometimes drew one arc of the simple fish outline in the dirt. If the stranger drew the other arc, both believers knew they were in good company. Current bumper-sticker and business-card uses of the fish hearken back to this practice.” **Elesha Coffman**, “What is the Origin of the Christian Fish Symbol,” *Christianity Today* (Aug 8, 2008), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/what-is-origin-of-christian-fish-symbol.html>.

<sup>17</sup>



Funerary stele with the inscription IXΘYC ZΩNTΩN (“fish of the living”) 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. National Roman Museum.

<sup>18</sup> **F. L. H. Millard**, “Piscina,” ed. George Harford, Morley Stevenson, and J. W. Tyrer, *The Prayer Book Dictionary* (New York: Longman, 1912), 538.

<sup>19</sup> The astronomical calendar does not begin Jan 1, but March 20-21, the date of the vernal equinox. See next n.

<sup>20</sup> Procession works backward from the annual movement of earth through the zodiac. On the annual traverse, Ares (begins March 21-Spring Equinox) follows Pisces (begins Feb 19) and

the Great Year is about to begin again. It's much too difficult to tell when a Platonic Month ends and another begins (astronomers vary greatly on this question), however, the idea is certainly not difficult to understand. It is possible that this ending month is what Paul had in mind when he said that Jesus is the one "One whom the end of the ages has come" (1Cor 10:11). Some Church Fathers thought so.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps, when this final month is finished, we usher in, biblically speaking, the eternal state. And, curiously, if we are near or at the end of the Great Year, that would put the great rebellion and the loosing of Satan pretty much any

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begins the new astronomical year. In Procession, Aquarius (begins Jan 21) follows Pisces. Looked at according to solar years, my theory works. Looked at according to the Great Year, and it is probably the case that Ares began a new cycle 4000 or so years ago. However, many have suggested that indeed, Pisces ends the cycle, see Origen in next n.

<sup>21</sup> "I have often found myself at a loss, when I bring together two conflicting apostolic sayings, how it is 'the end of the ages' in which 'once' Jesus 'hath been manifested to put away sins,' if there are 'ages to come' which shall be after this one ... If I may offer a conjecture on so great a matter, I think that, as the last month is the end of the year, after which the beginning of another month ensues, so it may be that, since several ages complete as it were a year of ages, the present age is 'the end,' after which certain 'ages to come' will ensue, of which the age to come is the beginning, and in those coming ages God will 'shew the riches of his grace in kindness.'" Origen, *On Prayer* 27.15. Cited in Henry Chadwick and J. E. L. Oulton (eds.), *Alexandrian Christianity: Selected Translations of Clement and Origen*, The Library of Christian Classics Vol. II (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press MCMLIV), 303-304. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015005616258&view=1up&seq=308>. For more on all this see David Flynn, "The Mars Earth Connection Cydonia in Ancient Science and Mythology," *YouTube* (July 9, 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGUthmNKvYA>. Start around 50:12ff. Also, Randall Carlson has an equally fascinating lecture called "Cosmic Patterns and Cycles of Catastrophe," but he is not coming at this from a Christian point of view as Flynn did.

time. This gives us a very different way of thinking about when the Very End might come.

As interesting as that is, I won't speculate any more. My point of this is that this idea of such a long period of time could be what is behind now calling this a Millennium. Instead of using any of the other previous terms for the same time period, this is the idea of a very long age.

Whatever the case, I also find it terribly interesting that what Dispensationalists look at as the last half of the terrible Great Tribulation to come is what I would refer to as the entirety of the last 2,000 years, the mystical second half of Daniel's Seventieth Week! 2,000 years' worth of massive persecution of Jesus' church, exactly what he foretells and promises throughout Revelation and the rest of the Bible. The main point of raising this question is to address [the compatibility of a present binding with a binding for a thousand years](#). Just as Satan is not a physical being literally locked up in chains that have a key, so also the length of his binding is symbolic for a long but not indefinite period of time that corresponds, mystically, to Christ's church as it parallels his earthly ministry. Yet, the binding and the

millennium are real things. Satan really was bound, and he really was bound for a long period of time.

### ***Question 11: What Are The Thrones?***

Now I want to move into our passage. **Vs. 4** speaks of “**thrones.**” “**Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed.**” **What are these thrones?** The language comes from Daniel 7 where Daniel sees the heavenly divine council preparing to open court as they sit on thrones (**Dan 7:9**). We’ve already seen how this passage is related to the Millennium, where they end up judging in favor of the saints of the Most High (vs. **22**). There, the thrones are heavenly, and it is the Watchers or sons of God who sit upon them.

Revelation also has seen thrones. Again, they are **heavenly**. Twenty-four elders sit on their thrones before God (**Rev 4:4; 11:6**). I suggested that at least in the first, and probably the second, this also refers to the heavenly host. This falls in line with the Apostle who talks about Christ being over both the visible and invisible realms, “**whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities**” (**Col 1:16**). Therefore, these thrones are supernatural, heavenly authorities who

judge, which is nearly what **Rev 20:4** depicts, though the occupants and how they get there are different.

*Qs 12-13: Who are Seated on The Thrones? Who are the “Souls”?*

But who is seated on these thrones? There are three sentences in **vs. 4** of the ESV. Each begins with the word “kai” in Greek.

*Kai eidon thronous ...* (ESV: “**Then** I saw thrones ...”)

*Kai tas pshchas ...* (ESV: “**Also** [I saw] the souls ...”)

*Kai ezēsan ...* (ESV: “**—** They came to life ...”)

The second sentence (ESV) reads, “*Also* I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the Word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads on their hands” (**Rev 20:4**). The word “also” (*kai*) is the same word translated “**then**” at the beginning of the first sentence, but curiously **not translated at all** at the beginning of the third sentence. Translating one word three different ways in one verse is a decision I wish the translators had not made. More literally it would simply be, “*And I saw thrones ... and the souls ... and they did live and reign ...*” (YLT).

This helps with what I believe John is seeing. The souls are not someplace else. *They are on the thrones*. How do we know? Because *they are reigning*. “They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” Where does a ruler reign from? His or her *throne*. Therefore, what John sees here is no longer watchers or the sons of God symbolized as constellations reigning on the thrones. He now sees human “souls.”

But *can we be more specific*? This is a difficult question. On one hand, they are *the martyrs* from earlier in the book. “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar *the souls* of those who had been slain *for the word of God and for the witness [marturia] they had borne*” (Rev 6:9). This is precisely what our verse says, “*Beheaded for the testimony [marturia] of Jesus and for the Word of God*” (20:4). Other references to things we have seen earlier also come up. They had “*not worshiped the beast or its image*.” Earlier we read, “It was allowed to give breath to *the image of the beast*, so that *the image* of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would *not worship the image of the beast* to be slain” (13:15). They had “*not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands*.” Again, we saw, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives *a mark on his forehead or on his hand*, he also

will drink the wine of God's wrath..." (14:8-9). So, clearly, it refers to martyrs.

On the other hand, what did Jesus say to the Seven Churches earlier? "The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give *authority over the nations*, and *he will rule them* with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father" (2:26). "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me *on my throne*, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (21). Also, look at the end of 20:6. "They will be *priests of God and of Christ*, and they will reign with him for a *thousand years*." This clearly belongs with the reigning during the thousand years. But what was said earlier about this? "You *have made* them a kingdom and *priests to our God*, and they shall reign on the earth" (5:10). This earthly reign (*basileusousin* is a future indicative) is all that is future in this verse. Yet, they *are* a kingdom, because the kingdom is now. They *are* priests. Again, the book begins, "By his blood" he "has freed us from our sins" "and *made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father*" (1:5). 20:6 is saying the same thing. You can now see how what Jesus said to the churches at the beginning is the same at the end. As these

verses should demonstrate, these **need not necessarily have died**, and in fact we commented in an earlier chapter that Revelation views all Christians as martyrs, not only those who literally are beheaded.

A point to make **relating this to the binding of Satan** and his no longer being allowed to deceive the nations is that this **replacing of Watchers with Christians** on the thrones is precisely what the Scripture has looked forward to since Eden. The heavenly host were ruling and judging. These are the heavenly “sons of God.” However, in Christ and through faith (**Gal 3:26**), by the power of the Holy Spirit (**Rom 8:14**), Christians now become “**sons of God**” (**Rom 8:19**). This is why Jesus says we “**cannot die anymore, because [we] are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection**” (**Luke 20:35**). Therefore, the Apostle says, “**You will judge angels**” (**1Co 6:3**). Again, the reign of the saints is somehow now.

#### ***Q. 14: When and from Where Do They Reign with Christ?***

When and where do they reign with Christ? ***In heavenly places, now.*** This is why it speaks of “**souls**” rather than “people” or “Christians” or even “bodies.” “Martyrs” helps you see that they have died (confirmed by “*the rest of the dead*”

in vs. 5), at least in some sense. It's "the souls" of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus. And so it speaks of the saints in heaven right now. But they need not be dead, for Christians are positionally in heaven right now, even living ones. That's the already-not yet of the Head and Body.

### ***Q. 15: Who are the Rest of the Dead?***

The next verse speaks of "the rest of the dead" (vs. 5) that do not come to life until the thousand years are ended? This clearly refers to non-Christians, for they do not share in the first resurrection (vs. 6).

### ***Q. 16: What is the "First Resurrection"?***

Our last question today is, "What is the First Resurrection?" (vs. 5, 6). As we begin, it is important to note that Premillennialists believe they have proof here that dead saints will return, bodily, with Christ and reign on earth for 1000 years. This includes both the coming to life of the saints and this coming to life of the non-Christians.

Of the saints, they read the martyrdom literally and their being alive as necessitating the coming resurrection of the body. Paul speaks of such a resurrection like this, "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be

changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality” (1Co 15:51-53). But this resurrection seems to take place at the very end of time, not at the beginning of the millennium: “An hour comes in which all those in the tombs will hear his voice, and they will come forth, those having done good deeds to a *resurrection of life*, those having practiced evil deeds to a *resurrection of judgment*” (John 5:28-29; cf. Acts 24:14-15). Notice how The Great Judgment takes place all at once, not 1000 years apart (see below).<sup>22</sup>

Can souls be alive without the resurrected body? Do you remember Jesus talking to the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection (Matt 22:22)? They tried to trap Jesus concerning this foolish teaching. He came back at them with these words, “As for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He

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<sup>22</sup> Helpful here are the articles Adam Maarshalk, “Revelation 20: Amillennial Viewpoint (Part 2),” *Pursuing Truth* Jan 27, 2010, <https://adammaarschalk.com/2010/03/03/revelation-20-amillennial-viewpoint-part-2/>.

is not God of the dead, but of the living’” (Matt 22:31-32). The Sadducees were silenced (34). Abraham was alive and yet the resurrection of the body had not yet even taken place. So yes, souls can very much be alive apart from the resurrected body. In fact, this is exactly the way Christians are described right now! “The one believing him who sent me *has eternal life* and does not come into judgment, but has passed from death into *life*” (John 5:24; cf. Rom 6:4-13).<sup>23</sup>

For this reason, there has been a disagreement among Amillennialists on the question of this “first resurrection.” Most today<sup>24</sup> believe it refers *only* to believers who have died and are with Christ—that they are reigning, alive, right now with Jesus from heaven. Somehow, they have received a kind of temporary resurrected body. However, others (Calvin and Augustine) see this as also *including* believers right now on earth who are ruling with Christ *positionally*, in heaven. In this way, the martyrs are identified with the 144,000 where we concluded that all Christians in Revelation are viewed as

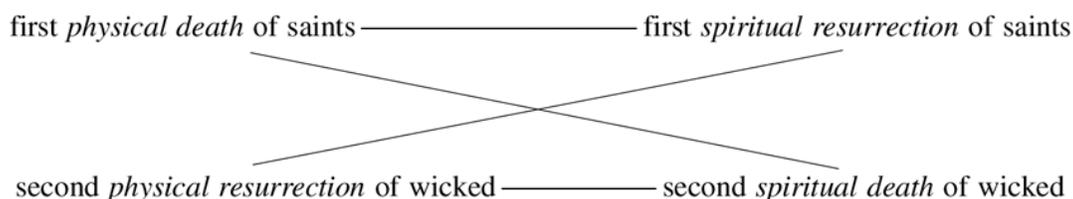
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<sup>23</sup> Norman Shepherd has a good article looking at many related passages as he takes the same view as Augustine on this passage. Unfortunately, he does not exegete the passage with it. Norman Shepherd, “The Resurrection of Revelation 20,” *WTJ* 37 (1974-75): 34-43.

<sup>24</sup> See Beale, 1005-17. Also, Meredith Kline, “The First Resurrection,” *WTJ* 37.3 (Spring 1975): 366-75. <https://meredithkline.com/klines-works/articles-and-essays/the-first-resurrection/>.

martyrs.<sup>25</sup> Those who “came to life” are, like the identical word used in Ezekiel’s dry bones (*ezēsan*; **Ezek 37:10 LXX**), regenerated.<sup>26</sup> They have eternal life *now*. I think the inverse parallel with John’s Gospel points this way as the parallel to the first resurrection and second death is, “Can a man enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (i.e. the second birth, being born again) (**John 3:5**).

As it regards unbelievers, **Premillennialists** also see this as a physical resurrection. But again, we have seen that the physical resurrection of the dead takes place all at once, not in stages. Many Amillennialists point out that it is quite possible, even probable, that this is a physical resurrection of the unbelievers that is in view, even though it is a *spiritual* resurrection of the saints in the previous chapter. This has to do with a literary chiasm:



<sup>25</sup> “In fact, both those who argue the 144,000 are martyrs and those who argue they represent all Christians are correct, because in the Apocalypse all faithful Christians are martyrs.” **Paul Middleton**, *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies 586 (New York, T&T Clark, 2020), 212.

<sup>26</sup> The same form of the word only appears here and **Num 14:38 LXX**. The immediate image in Ezekiel is that of corporate Israel returning to the land after captivity. The symbol of a dry bone coming to life clearly depicts resurrection. However, Israel never physically died. Therefore, it is often (I think appropriately) used as a metaphor of regeneration. Gentry asserts that the word cannot mean regeneration, but he never explains why (**Gentry**, 2:692).

But it could also be that here we also have a **spiritual resurrection** in mind, not like the Christians where they are brought from death to life, but in the sense of being brought out of whatever punishment has been happening for dead unbelievers during the 1000 years (in Hades). They are then brought out to stand before the presence of God. At this same time, it seems they too will be given resurrected bodies and judged with their eternal sentence accordingly. But I admit, this is unclear to me.

Premillennialism	First Resurrection	Christians	Come to life	Physically	Prior to Millennium
	n/a	Non-Christians	Come to life	Physically	After the Millennium
Amillennialism # 1	First Resurrection	Christians	Come to life	Spiritually	Regeneration
	n/a	Non-Christians	Come to life	Spiritually	Hades to the Throne of God
Amillennialism # 2	First Resurrection	Christians	Come to life	Spiritually	After Death
	n/a	Non-Christians	Come to life	Physically	Hades to the Throne of God

### ***Conclusion: The Present Reign of the Saints***

The conclusion of these questions is that if the thousand years is now, then the souls are reigning now. It is a heavenly reign, that both the dead and living Christians participate in now. John is not talking about the physical resurrection, but the *spiritual* resurrection, because he sees *souls* in *heaven* and the great physical resurrection takes place at the end of time all at once—believers and unbelievers together to be judged

and punished and rewarded accordingly. This would curiously fit our already/not yet paradigm if we compare the parallel in John's Gospel. In John 20, it is Jesus who is physically raised from the dead. However, in Revelation 20, it is Christians who are spiritually raised from the dead. Is this not what the Apostle says in Romans 6, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4). When? Right now! He has “raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places” (Eph 2:6).

Let's return to the binding and loosing of Matthew's gospel. We saw last time that Matthew 16's binding and loosing is somehow related to the spiritual powers and the gates of hell cannot prevail. This in turn connects nicely to the binding of Satan in Revelation 20. But that passage and its parallel both use the exact same language of binding and loosing in the context of *the church*. This power to bind and loose somehow demonstrates authority, rule, and reigning,

not on the earth now, but in the kingdom of God, which is invisible and spiritual.

This becomes the context of Matthew 18. Jesus has a brother sinning against you. **What should you do?** Gossip about him? Ignore him? Make the pastor go deal with him? **“Go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone”** (**Matt 18:15**). What if he does not listen? Write about him on social media? Passively aggressively pray against him in a church meeting? Make the pastor go deal with him? **“Take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses”** (**16**). In other words, **follow the OT moral law of God**.

What if he still refuses to listen? Now you **“tell it to the church”** (**17**). However, if he refuses to listen even to the entire church, **“let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector”** (**17b**). This is the hardest part to understand. Jews considered these people **outsiders** and unworthy of participation with the people of God. On the other hand, throughout this Gospel, Jesus is commonly found **having dinner with them**. It seems to me that rather than choose between the two, we can merge them in this way. On one hand, they are no longer treated as the people of God. Gentiles, by birth, rightly belong to the realm of *Satan*. That

doesn't mean they aren't Christians, however. It just means that they are in a state of such unrepentant sin that the entire congregation agrees what they have done is wrong and they do not care. But rather than totally shun them, they may be treated just as Jesus treated the Gentiles and tax-collectors, with love and hospitality, hoping to win back their brother. The church isn't locking people out of heaven, but hoping that they will come to their senses by putting them back in the spiritual kingdom of darkness on earth.

This is what it seems to me it must mean that we bind and loose in heaven in this process. I think the parallel in 1Cor 5 demonstrates this. “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are *to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord*” (1Cor 5:4-5). Satan is the key here, for this is the language of the keys to Hades. In other words, you give him back to the realm of Satan, outside the kingdom of God, so that he may learn the futility and darkness of that place. The goal is restorative and redemptive, and it parallels the binding of Satan in Rev 20:1-3 only now, the church exercises this authority.

The point I'm making is that ruling and authority and reigning really does begin in the church, with God's people, now. This is why Paul says that God has "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6). The power is not earthly, but heavenly; not natural, but supernatural. It is not the power of governments and kings and armies and military. It is the power of priests, the power to call someone from death to life because God's word is powerful; the power to judge between good and evil. It is a power that Satan cannot stop, for this power directly attacks his kingdom in spiritual places.

Augustine writes of our passage,

And I saw the seats ... For, after saying that the devil is bound a thousand years and is afterwards loosed for a short season, it goes on to give a sketch of what the Church does or of what is done in the Church in those days. It is not to be supposed that this refers to the last judgment, but to the seats of the rulers and to the rulers themselves by whom the Church is now governed. And no better interpretation of judgment being given can be produced than that which we have in the words, What ye bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what ye loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven

(Matthew 18:18). Whence the apostle says, “What have I to do with judging them that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?” (1Cor 5:12).<sup>27</sup>

Yes, there is a not-yet component to all this. We do not rule the earth in resurrected bodies now. But there certainly is an already component. That’s why we need all of God’s word to help us understand this important passage. With it, we do not come to the end of the book in a theological vacuum, but [full of an eschatology](#) that allows us to dance the dance between this present evil age and the age to come. It is a dance we all must learn, for together we find ourselves squarely participating in both. Let us learn to act as those who reign and to overcome the sin that remains together with Christ’s body. We need one another. This is a church thing. We do it, because we know that our King is in Heaven, reigning over all things, even to the end of the age.

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<sup>27</sup> [Augustine](#), *City of God* 20.9.2.

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