

THE MILLENNIUM
Revelation 20:1-10
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Today we are going to study eschatology. Eschatology comes from the Greek word *eschatos*, “last things.” Eschatology is the study of the last things, or the study of the end times.
2. In particular, we’re going to look at the book of Revelation, the most controversial book in the Bible, and specifically Revelation 20, the most controversial chapter in the book of Revelation.
3. The really controversial part is Revelation 20:1-10, which deals with the millennium.
4. “Millennium” comes from two Latin words – Mille, one thousand; and annus, years.
5. Revelation 20 mentions a period of one-thousand years, and it mentions it six times. This period is known as the millennium.
6. Let’s read the text.

II. TEXT: Revelation 20:1-10

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven holding the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the abyss, closed it, and put a seal on it so that he would no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years were completed. After that, he must be released for a short time. 4 Then I saw thrones, and people seated on them who were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and who had not accepted the mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. 7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the

earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle. Their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 They came up across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the encampment of the saints, the beloved city. Then fire came down from heaven and consumed them. 10 The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

1. Structure of the passage:

- i. The binding of Satan for one-thousand years: 1-3
 - ii. The reigning of the saints with Christ: 4-6
 - iii. The release and destruction of Satan at the end of the millennium: 7-10
2. How should we interpret all of this? The key question has to do with the timing of the millennium. When will the millennium happen? There are three main views.

III. THREE MAIN VIEWS OF THE MILLENNIUM

1. Amillennialism.

- i. The millennium is the period of time between Christ's first and second comings. It began with Christ's ministry on earth, and it will end when Christ returns. In other words, we are in the millennium now. The millennium is the church age. At the end of the millennium Satan will instigate a final attack against the church, but this will be put down by Christ when He returns.
- ii. Amillennialists believe that the one-thousand years is not literal, but figurative for a long period of time. But this is not unique among Amillennialists; some scholars from the other two views also interpret it figuratively.
- iii. This should be easy to accept for two reasons:
 - 1. Revelation is a highly symbolic and figurative book. Christ is described as a lamb, but He's not a literal lamb. Satan is described as a dragon, but he's not a literal dragon.
 - 2. The number 1,000 is often used figuratively in the Bible. For example, the Ps 50:10 says that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. That doesn't mean that He only owns the cattle on a thousand hills; it means that He owns all the cattle; He is infinitely wealthy.

2. Postmillennialism.

- i. Similar to amillennialism, postmillennialism holds that the millennium is the period between Christ's first and second comings. However, it believes that at some point in the millennium, the church and the gospel will be victorious, and the vast majority of people on the earth will be converted. This will result in a long period of peace and prosperity on the earth. At the very end, Satan will be released for a final attack on the church which will be put down by Christ's at His return.
 - ii. Amillennialism is very similar, but amillennialism don't teach that the entire world will be converted and Christianized for a long period of time.
- 3. Premillennialism.
 - i. Both amillennialism and postmillennialism believe that the millennium is now, and that Christ will return after the millennium.
 - ii. Premillennialism believes that Christ will return before the millennium. He will then reign on the earth for a long period of time – perhaps a literal millennium. At the very end there will be a final battle with Satan which Christ will win, followed by the final judgment and the renewal of the cosmos.
 - iii. The view that I think is the most biblical is amillennialism, so that is what I will spend the rest of my time explaining.
 - iv. Before I do that, let me state that the millennium is a third-order doctrine at Church Acadiana. In other words, we will agree to disagree on this issue. You can hold to amillennialism, post-millennialism, or premillennialism at Church Acadiana. All three positions fall within orthodoxy. What does it mean to agree to disagree? It means that you can disagree passionately, but you must be respectful. Don't condemn and demean people who hold the other views. Don't say, "They don't know their Bibles; or they don't respect Scripture." There are highly intelligent, fully-devoted followers of Jesus on all sides of this issue.
 - v. To explain the amillennial position, I want to begin by explaining in a little more detail the premillennial position, because these two views are very different.

IV. THE PREMILLENNIAL POSITION

1. The prefix “pre” means before. Premillennialism means that Christ will return before the millennium and reign on earth for 1,000 years.
2. During the millennium Satan will be bound, no longer able to deceive the nations.
3. At the beginning of the millennium, when Christ returns, believers will receive their resurrected bodies and live on earth with Christ for the millennium.
4. At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released to stir up a final rebellion against Christ and the church. He will be destroyed by Christ and thrown into the lake of fire.
5. This will be followed by the resurrection and final judgment of unbelievers and the renewal of the cosmos.
6. So, notice that in the premillennial understanding, there will be two resurrections: that of believers at the beginning of the millennium, and of unbelievers at the end of the millennium.

V. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REVELATION 19-20

1. Why do premillennialists hold this view? Why do they believe that Christ comes back after the millennium, while the other two views view the millennium as before the return of Christ? The main reason has to do with their interpretation of the relationship of Revelation 19 & 20. In Revelation 19:11-21, there is a description of Christ riding on a white horse fighting a great battle and throwing the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire. Premillennialists interpret this to be the second coming of Christ. And since it comes before the millennium in Revelation 20, the Christ must return before the millennium; the millennium must occur after the Second Coming. Let’s read that passage.

2. Revelation 19:11-21

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war.

12 His eyes were like a fiery flame, and many crowns were on his head. He had a name written that no one knows except himself. 13 He wore a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. 14 The armies that were in heaven followed him on white horses, wearing pure white linen. 15 A sharp sword came from his mouth, so that he might strike the nations with it. He will rule them with an iron rod. He will also trample the winepress of the fierce anger of God, the Almighty. 16 And

he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he called out in a loud voice, saying to all the birds flying high overhead, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of military commanders, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and of their riders, and the flesh of everyone, both free and slave, small and great."

19 Then I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and against his army. 20 But the beast was taken prisoner, and along with it the false prophet, who had performed the signs in its presence. He deceived those who accepted the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image with these signs. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21 The rest were killed with the sword that came from the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds ate their fill of their flesh.

3. As I said, premillennialists see this as a description of the Second Coming, and they believe that Revelation 20 follows chronologically, which means the millennium occurs after the return of Christ.
4. However, there are a couple of problems with this interpretation.
 - i. First, it is not clear to all that this is a description of the Second Coming.
 - ii. Second, it is not clear that Revelation 19 and 20 are connected chronologically.
 - iii. Let's look at both of these problems a little closer.
5. First, it is not clear that Rev 19:11-21 is a description of the Second Coming.
 - i. For one thing, the word "coming" or "come" is not found in the passage. It doesn't say that Christ is coming back or returning. It simply says that He is riding on a white horse and waging war.
 - ii. Also, Acts 1:11 says that Christ will return the same way He ascending into heaven, and He didn't ascend into heaven on a white horse. In fact, in the rest of the Bible when the Second Coming is described, Jesus is never riding on a white horse. Why is that?

- iii. So, if this is not a description of the Second Coming, then what is it? There are many views by very capable scholars. One views that this is a description of Christ conquering the nations with the gospel in the present age. His sword was coming out of His mouth (v. 15), which is believed to be the gospel. The white horse could represent the church, the vehicle through which Jesus carries out His gospel mission. And as the gospel is preached, people are conquered; they surrender to the rule of Christ. So, some believe this is a picture of Christ and the gospel going into all the world in the present age.
 - iv. A second view is that rather than this being a description of the second coming, it is a description of Christ coming in judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70. According to this view, most of Revelation is about the war between Rome and Israel in AD 66-70. The beast is the emperor Nero, whom Christ destroyed in AD 60, and the false prophet is the Jewish priesthood, whom Christ destroyed in AD 70 along with Jerusalem and the temple. I favor this view.
 - v. So, it is not clear that Rev 19 is a description of the Second Coming. There are many different views.
- 6. Second, it is not clear that Rev 19 & 20 are connected chronologically. Revelation is not a history book in which one passage follows the next in time. It is a series of visions, not necessarily in chronological order. For example, in Rev 2-3 the resurrected Christ is writing letters to seven churches in Asia. But then in Rev 12 there is a description of Christ's birth. The birth of Christ doesn't follow the resurrection, but that's okay, because Revelation is not meant to be read chronologically. Many interpreters of Revelation believe that John is utilizing a literary device called recapitulation, in which he is revisiting the same events but from different perspectives, each vision highlighting different details, and increasing in intensity. For example, one view sees the wars in Rev 19:11-21 and Rev 20:7-10 as the same, only highlighting different things. The war in Rev 19 describes the fate of the beast and false prophet, and the war in Rev 20 describes the fate of Satan. In other words, Rev 20 doesn't follow Rev 19 chronologically; instead they are visions of the same event but from a different perspective.
- 7. The point is this: The premillennial position holds that Christ comes back before the millennium primarily because of its interpretation of Rev 19

as a description of the second coming, followed chronologically by the millennium in Rev 20. However, as I have shown, it is not clear that Rev 19 is describing the second coming; and second it is not clear that Rev 19 & 20 are connected chronologically.

8. I agree with the view that Rev 19:11-21 is describing Christ's coming in judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70 in which he defeated the beast (Nero) and the false prophet (the Jewish high priest). This happened at the beginning of the church, or the millennium. Then Revelation 20 goes into more detail about the millennium.

9. Now let's get into a more detailed explanation of Revelation 20:1-10.

VI. EXPOSITION OF REVELATION 20:1-10

1. The binding of Satan.

- i. **Revelation 20:1-3** Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven holding the key to the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the abyss, closed it, and put a seal on it so that he would no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years were completed. After that, he must be released for a short time.
- ii. In this passage alone Satan has four names:
 1. Dragon
 2. Ancient serpent
 3. Devil: "false accuser"
 4. Satan: "adversary"
- iii. An angel takes four actions against Satan:
 1. He seizes him.
 2. He binds him.
 3. He throws him into the abyss.
 4. He seals him in the abyss.
- iv. What is the abyss? The ESV says "bottomless pit." We're not sure what it is, but that is not really important. The main point is that Satan was bound in some way.
- v. Remember, premillennialists believe that this happens after Christ comes back. But as an amillennialist, I believe the Christ bound Satan at His first coming, so that Satan is bound, has been bound since Christ's first coming, and will be bound until Christ's return. Let's look at several passages:

- vi. **Matthew 12:28:29** 28 If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 How can someone enter a strong man's house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house.
 - 1. The Pharisees accused Jesus of driving out demons by the power of Satan; in other words, of being in league with Satan. Jesus responded by saying that His casting out demons is proof that he "ties up" (ESV, "binds") "the strong man," meaning Satan. In other words, Jesus said that He bound Satan at His first coming. What is really interesting is that the Greek word for "ties up" here in Matthew is the exact same word for "bound" in Revelation 20. Christ claimed to bind Satan in some way at His first coming.
- vii. **Luke 11:21-22** 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his estate, his possessions are secure. 22 But when one stronger than he attacks and overpowers him, he takes from him all his weapons he trusted in, and divides up his plunder.
 - 1. This is Luke's account of the same event. Jesus said that at His first coming He overpowered, or conquered Satan in some aspect.
- viii. **Colossians 2:15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him.
 - 1. This is talking about what Jesus accomplished by His death. He "disarmed" Satan in some way.
- ix. **Hebrews 2:14** Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil.
 - 1. This passage says is talking about the death of Christ. He took on flesh and blood like us so that He could die for us. Why? To "destroy" the devil. The word destroy can mean "render inactive." The NIV says "break the power." The Weymouth translation says "render powerless."
- x. When you put all this together, this is what we can conclude: On the one hand, the Bible Satan is still clearly active in the world. Eph 6 says that Satan is scheming against us; we are in a struggle

against him; and he is shooting flaming arrows at us. 1 Pt 5:8 says that Satan is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. He is still an active threat. On the other hand, the Bible says that at Christ's first coming, through His life, death, and resurrection, He did something to Satan. He bound Him (Mt 11:29), overpowered him (Lk 11:22), disarmed him (Col 2:15), and destroyed him (Heb 2:14). So it is clear that a binding of some sort took place at the beginning of the millennium.

- x. Someone might ask, "How can you say that Satan is bound, when it seems clear that Satan is highly active?" Rev 20 does not say that Satan was completely bound. It says that he was bound in a specific way.

- 1. **Revelation 20:3** "He threw him into the abyss, closed it, and put a seal on it so that he would no longer deceive the nations."

- 2. **Revelation 20:7-8** 7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle.

- xii. The binding specifically prevents Satan from doing one thing: deceiving the nations so as to gather them for a worldwide battle against Christ.

- xiii. **Sam Storms** puts it well:

- 1. "The intent of the devil is to incite a premature eschatological conflict, to provoke Armageddon before its, that is to say, before God's time. But the exalted Christ, through the agency of an angelic being, has temporarily stripped Satan of his ability to orchestrate the nations of the earth for the final battle." (*Kingdom Come*, 439.)
 - 2. "Although Satan may and will do much in this present age, there is one thing of which John assures us: Satan will never be permitted to incite and organize the unbelieving nations of the world in a final, catastrophic assault against the Church, until such time as God in his providence so determines." (*Kingdom Come*, 440.)

2. The reigning of the saints with Christ.

- i. **Revelation 20:4-6** 4 Then I saw thrones, and people seated on them who were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and who had not accepted the mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.
- ii. Next John sees a vision of people who come to life, sit on thrones, judging and reigning with Christ during the millennium. John calls this the first resurrection, and that those who share it in will not have to suffer the second death.
- iii. Let me explain the premillennial interpretation. When Christ comes back and sets up an earthly kingdom for 1,000 years, Christians experience the bodily resurrection and reign with Christ for the millennium.
- iv. One of the main problems with this view is that it means there are two bodily resurrections separated by 1,000 years. Believers are resurrected at the beginning of the millennium, and then unbelievers after the millennium. The reason that's a problem is that elsewhere in scripture it seems to clearly say that believers and unbelievers will be resurrected at the same time.
 1. **John 5:28-29** 28 Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his voice 29 and come out—those who have done good things, to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked things, to the resurrection of condemnation.
 - a. This seems to clearly put the resurrection of the just and unjust at the same time – when they all hear his voice.
 2. **Acts 24:15** I have a hope in God, which these men themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection, both of the righteous and the unrighteous.

- a. Paul describes the resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous as “a resurrection,” not two resurrections divided by 1,000 years.
- 3. **John 6:39** This is the will of him who sent me: that I should lose none of those he has given me but should raise them up on the last day.
 - a. Jesus said that believers will be resurrection on “the last day,” and John 12:48 says that unbelievers will be judged “on the last day.”
- 4. **John 12:48** The one who rejects me and doesn’t receive my sayings has this as his judge: The word I have spoken will judge him on the last day.
- v. It seems clear that there is only one bodily resurrection, and it doesn’t happen until after the millennium when Christ returns.
- vi. Then, what does this passage mean when it says that the saints “came to life”, and “this is the first resurrection.” This is talking specifically about Christian martyrs who had been killed for their faith. One of the primary purposes of Revelation is to encourage persecuted Christians to stand firm in the faith even at the risk of their life. This passage is saying that those who are martyred for their faith will come to life, that is, go on living in heaven, where they will reign with Christ. This is true of all believers who die – they will go on living and reigning with Christ in heaven, but John was specifically aiming to encourage persecuted believers.
- vii. The first resurrection, therefore, is talking about the intermediate state – the life of Christians in heaven after they die, but before the return of Christ and the resurrection of the body. Those who experience this first resurrection will not face the second death, which is the lake of fire (Rev 20:14). Unbelievers don’t experience this first resurrection; that is, they do not go to heaven when they die. They go to a temporary place of suffering until the final judgment, at which point they will be thrown into the lake first, the second death.
- viii. So, believers experience the first resurrection but not the second death. Unbelievers experience the second death, but not the first resurrection. Both will experience the second resurrection (bodily) when Christ returns.

3. The release and final defeat of Satan.

- i. **Revelation 20:7-10** 7 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle. Their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 They came up across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the encampment of the saints, the beloved city. Then fire came down from heaven and consumed them. 10 The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.
- ii. At the end of the millennium Satan is released, and he deceives and gathers the nations for a final attack against the church – “the beloved city”. But fire comes from heaven and destroys them, and Satan is thrown into the lake of fire. It mentions “Gog and Magog,” which was a common Jewish expression for nations that rebel against God.
- iii. Here’s where everyone agrees: This is the last battle, after which comes the final judgment and renewal of the cosmos.
- iv. Here’s the disagreement: Premillennialists say that this last battle will happen 1,000 years after Christ returns, whereas amillennialists believe this last battle will happen at the return of Christ.
- v. Let me give you two reasons why I think this last battle happens at the return of Christ rather than 1,000 years later.
 1. First, the description here seems very similar to the description of the second coming in 2 Thessalonians.
 - a. **2 Thessalonians 1:6-8** 6 since it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted, along with us. This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels, 8 when he takes vengeance with flaming fire on those who don’t know God and on those who don’t obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

- b. This passage says that at the revelation of Christ (i. e., His second coming), He will destroy the enemies of the church with fire.
 - c. Rev 20:9 says that “fire came down from heaven and consumed” the enemies of Christ.
 - 2. Second, Rev 20 says that right after this battle comes the judgment (20:11-15) and renewal of the cosmos (Rev 21), which the rest of the NT places at the return of Christ.
 - a. **Matthew 25:31-32** When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels, with him then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations, will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
 - b. **2 Peter 3:10-13** 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed. 11 Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness 12 as you wait for the day of God and hasten its coming. Because of that day, the heavens will be dissolved with fire and the elements will melt with heat. 13 But based on his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.
 - i. By “day of the Lord” Peter is referring to the second coming, which is the context of the passage (see v. 4).
 - vi. Therefore, I think this passage is describing the last battle between Satan and Christ’s church, which Christ wins decisively at His second coming.

VII. CONCLUSION

1. Now let me wrap all this up for you.
2. Revelation 20 describes the millennium – a period of one thousand years.
3. In this sermon I have defended the amillennial position.

- i. "One-thousand years" is not to be taken literally, but figuratively for a long period of time.
- ii. The millennium covers the period between Christ's first and second coming. So, the millennium is now.
- iii. During the millennium, Satan is bound so that he is unable to gather the nations for a final catastrophic assault against the church.
- iv. Also during the millennium, believers who die (martyrs, in particular) will reign in heaven with Christ.
- v. At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released to organize the final attack on the church, but Christ will come back and throw him into the lake of fire.
- vi. Then will happen the bodily resurrection, the final judgment, and the renewal of creation, where believers will live with God and Christ forever.