

The Revelation to John
Chapter Twenty
The Millennium

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Originally written in 2008

Now we come to the most “discussed” topic probably in all of Christendom. Some of the discussions have even become rather un-Christian. I am not sure why some people so fervently want their interpretation to be the only one that is correct. I think that I finally understand it properly, but I am also ready to admit that I may be wrong. The millennial time period is just the time between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the time when He comes again. God gave this “chapter” vision to John to give us peace and joy knowing that all of us will be in heaven reigning with Jesus until the time of the final judgment of Satan and all of his followers and the end of death. This is a wonderful encouragement! With this interpretation we also get a glimpse of what happens to us after our death. To view the millennium as only an end-time event robs believers of this powerful message. The OT and later Jewish literature look forward to a time when the KOG will rule the world but in none of those writings is the reign of the Messiah stated to be 1000 years:

- 1Sam 13:13-14 *Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. (14) "But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."*
- Dan 2:44 *"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.*
- Luke 8:1 *Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him,*

The way that I think is correct gives me a lot of peace but it does not guarantee that I will be removed from a terrible tribulation time and it does not give me a literal 1000 year time to rule with Jesus during a time of great peace on earth. I guess many people do not want to have themselves or their loved ones go through a terrible tribulation time but in the past 2000 years many wonderful people have been horribly persecuted and killed. Our promise from our Lord is that we will not receive His condemnation and that we will live forever in His blessed presence: *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."* (John 3:36). That is enough for me.

The ancient church to the time of Augustine (354-430) believed the teaching that there would be a time of peace following the defeat of the antichrist and the physical resurrection of the saints. But the Millennium teaching was a balance between a worldly and a spiritual aspect. Augustine changed the understanding that stood for centuries as he

understood that there was no literal 1000-year reign of Christ on earth but that the Millennium was the time period between the first and second advents of Christ. Ribeira (1537-91) taught that this time period was in heaven and not on earth and that reigning there for the saints was a reward for faithfulness. This understanding is prevalent today also and seems to be the understanding of Berkouwer and B. B. Warfield.

There is no indication that John intended for this chapter to chronologically follow the previous discussion. It seems that he is just taking us behind the scenes again. There have been horrible persecutions and many martyrs have been made but Jesus Christ still reigns. Many Christian martyrs exist but we will see that they also reign with Jesus in heaven. The first resurrection is when the souls of God's people are released after a physical death. The second resurrection will be when the Christian's body is reunited with his soul.

Rev 20:1 “And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

Rev 20:2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,

Rev 20:3 and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.”

John does not tell us anything about this angel except that he came down to earth from heaven. Remember from our study of chapter twelve that Satan has already been cast out of heaven unto earth at the same time of the triumph of Jesus on the cross. Satan then deceives and persecutes God's people (13:14; 18:23). John's vision describes Satan then as very busy (2:10, 13: 12:17; 16:13; and 2 Peter 5:8). Of course the key and the chain are symbolic for a spirit cannot be bound with such physical items. John makes sure that we understand the identity of the being about to be thrown into the abyss. He gives him all of his names: dragon, serpent of old (from the Garden of Eden), the devil, and Satan. This angel binds him for a period of time, threw him into the abyss, shut the “door” and sealed it over him. The reason for the binding is so that he cannot deceive the nations anymore until the time dictated by God is over and then he will be released for a short time. Could the description in chapter 17 be of him coming out? However he does continue to attack individuals.

We do not take the thousand years literally but symbolically like the key and the chain. The number one thousand is just ten (the number of completeness) cubed and three is the number of divine perfection. Satan is thus bound for the perfect time period set by God. The point of the binding in that place is that he is completely under God's control. This is not primarily a punishment, although he may see it that way, but he is kept from deceiving the nations as he had done before. He is not kept from doing much evil and from deceiving individuals via his demons for he is not said to be isolated. In verse eight we will see that when he is released he will again deceive nations. In the Old Testament time he deceived many nations and caused much war between them. However, during this “millennium” (the time from the resurrection of Jesus Christ until His second advent)

he cannot be a nation-deceiver. In the history of the last two thousand years we see many evil rulers but no deceived nations warring against God's people. Even during some of the awful times in the last two thousand years there were times when individuals and their followers persecuted Christians and other religious people, there has not been a time when total nations were deceived by him. During the first advent of Jesus Satan was bound while Jesus did His exorcisms and other actions against Satan: *"But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house."* (Mark 3:27) However this was only for that time period and Satan was not cast into an abyss then.

This understanding also fits with the prior vision that showed us that Satan was cast out of heaven at the time of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Understood without the baggage of a preconceived notion of a literal seven-year tribulation period and a literal 1000 year rule on earth, the book really gives us a clear picture of the future.

Rev 20:4 "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

John does not say where the thrones were or who sat upon them. However in all 47 times he uses this word for thrones, only the thrones of Satan and the beast appear to be on earth. Thus the thrones are most likely to be in heaven. The millennial time scene is in heaven, not on earth. He then says that he saw the **souls** of those who had been martyred for Jesus and God's word, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark of the beast on their forehead and hand. The Greek word translated "beheaded" actually means killed with an ax and the meaning here is more general since Rome had changed its execution method at the time of John's writing. Thus these are the martyrs of all ages. Other interpretations are that they represent all saints who were willing to face death rather than deny Christ even if they were not actually martyred. I say of all ages for these people died not only because of the testimony of Jesus but also because of the word of God. Jesus and Paul also referred to those who will serve on thrones with Him:

- Luke 22:28-30 *"You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; (29) and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you (30) that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*
- 1Cor 6:2 *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?*

We then understand that those who were judged by the courts of the world to be worthy of death are then judges of the earth under the authority of Christ.

Above I emphasized the word "souls" for he does not refer to their bodies. This does not envision a bodily resurrection. The Greek word translated "came to life" actually means lived. Therefore this time of reigning of the souls of the martyrs is in the time period

from the resurrection until the second coming of Jesus Christ. We know that all of God's children's souls go to heaven upon death and now we know that all of the martyrs are ruling with Jesus in heaven during this time after the first advent of Jesus. It is a busy time! Nobody is just sitting around playing a harp! Paul also referred to our being present with the Lord after the death of our physical body:

2Cor 5:6-8 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- (7) for we walk by faith, not by sight-- (8) we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

This interpretation gives Christians a lot of peace and understanding that they, the ones already preceded them in death, and those who will die rule in heaven with Christ until the second advent of Christ.

Rev 20:5 “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”

The sense of the writing indicates that the first resurrection refers to the raising of the martyrs to rule with Jesus for the thousand years. But he tells us that all the enemies of God would not live until after the completion of the thousand years. We have another beatitude given by John as the martyrs in this first resurrection are blessed and holy. Also the second death has no power over them. John defines the second death in verse 14 below. It is being thrown in the lake of fire. The raised martyrs will be priests of God and of Jesus and will reign with Him for the thousand years. This will be a time of righteousness, peace and joy as the saints reign in heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible then teaches that Christians already have a special place in heaven:

1. The children of God already are spiritually in heaven: *“and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,”* (Eph 2:6)
2. Our citizenship is in heaven:
 - *Phil 3:20 “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;”*
 - *Col 1:13 “For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,”*
 - *1Thess 2:12 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”*

But during this millennial reign our souls will be engaged in serving God in very special ways and in full consciousness of our new identity, albeit it without our bodies. At the second coming of Jesus Christ there will then be a bodily resurrection and glorification. We then clearly understand that Satan has no power of death over Christians:

Heb 2:14-15 *Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.*

Rev 20:7 “And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,

Rev 20:8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.”

The Greek word translated “when” actually means “whenever” and that seems to correlate further the understanding that the thousand years is not a literal time period. When the time set by God is over Satan is released from his binding so that he can again deceive all the nations on the earth. Why does God do this? It is particularly troublesome to understand if one interprets the thousand years literally and as a time when Christ rules on earth during a time of peace. But understanding that this thousand years is not literal and is a time when God’s people rule with Jesus in heaven, one can see God’s reason is to show that many people susceptible to the deceiving of Satan will still be living on earth during that “millennium”. God will then bring about a punishment of all those who have not been sealed by the Holy Spirit and thus really serve Satan. During the time between the First and Second Advent of Christ, many whose name was written in the book of Life have been brought to serve Him in heaven and many have flourished on earth in service to Satan. When Satan is released from not being allowed to deceive nations, the vast multitude of people willing to serve him will be revealed. The dispensationalists have a problem explaining how such a vast number of people willing to follow Satan will come about during a time when Christ rules in peace on earth for 1000 years. It seems that Gog and Megog just refer to all people because the antecedent is “nations”. Gog and Magog are only mentioned two other times in the Bible and in apocalyptic writings they symbolize forces of evil.

- *1Ch 1:5 “The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.”*
- *Ezek 38:2 “Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him,*

Satan manages to bring together a huge force but God is always the majority. This is the final battle (17:14 and 19:19).

Rev 20:9 “And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.”

The saints and the city were surrounded but that did not matter. The “beloved city” just means an organized community of people dedicated to God. It seems that the stage is set for a huge battle but none comes. Just like as described in 19:19-21 John writes quickly

that the enemy is annihilated quickly. A similar quick destruction from heaven is described by Ezekiel:

Ezek 38:22 “And with pestilence and with blood I shall enter into judgment with him; and I shall rain on him, and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone.”

There are only two communities of man in the world. They consist of the City of God and the City of Satan. The city here then is the City of God representing all the people of God in heaven and the camp of the saints represents those Christians still on earth at this time. The City of God will be in plain view in the following chapters. We read at the end of chapter 19 that the beast and the false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire. This teaching of the lake of fire is probably related to the teachings of Jesus on hell such as in:

- Matt 5:22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.
- Matt 7:19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
- Matt 10:28 "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.
- Matt 13:49 "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous,

Rev 20:10 “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

The great deceiver is now thrown in an everlasting torment with the other members of the evil trinity. There is no escape from the lake of fiery sulfur. The tormenting is constant and lasts forever and ever. The defeat of Satan and his evil forces is now complete. God’s justice is revealed.

Rev 20:11 “And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.”

John now sees a magnificent throne befitting God. He does not tell us which member of the Trinity is on the throne but such a depiction usually infers the Father. The scene was so awesome that nobody or nothing could approach it. We have preciously studied the concepts of functional and positional reality based upon 2 Cor 4:18. Functional reality is what we see and experience as we walk in the world. Positional reality is what cannot be seen physically but that exists eternally. Positional reality becomes functional reality also as all can see it. The only reality is now present and there is no place in it for anything other than God and all must appear before His throne for judgment except for those who are in Christ:

Heb 9:27-28 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment, (28) so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of

many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him.

Rev 20:12 “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”

Before this awesome judgment John now saw all the dead standing. The collection of people included the kings and the slaves, the men and the women. Many books were opened that contained all the works of the people. The book of life was also opened. Judgment is always based upon works but God’s people are saved from His condemnation by the works of Jesus Christ. Christians will also be judged but not before this judgment throne:

- 1Cor 3:12-15 *Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, (13) each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. (14) If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. (15) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*
- 2Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*
- Rom 14:10 *But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.*

Rev 20:13 “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.”

John now adds other sources of dead just to make the point that nobody is overlooked. Everyone who ever existed is judged according to their deeds. Death is the fate of everyone and Hades is the place of residence until judgment time. So John is not concerned with how anyone died but just that everyone will be judged. He adds again that the judgment is according to their deeds. Paul and Peter also taught that God will judge every man by his deeds:

- Rom 2:5-8 *“But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ⁶who will render to every man according to his deeds: ⁷to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; ⁸but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.”*

- *1Pe 1:17 “And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth;”*

Rev 20:14 “And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

Rev 20:15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

The final act is to throw into the lake of fire death and Hades for neither is needed again. There will be no solace of death for those people thrown into the lake of fire. We again see the importance of the book of life for if a person's name is not found in this book; he faces an eternity of punishment in the lake of fire. There are two categories of people in the world: the saved and the lost. The ones who are saved by the works of Jesus Christ will live forever in the bliss of heaven. The lost people will live forever in the lake of fire. Surely if anyone had a choice it would be easy! But we have already observed that mankind continues to curse God even in the face of horrible judgments.