

The Millennium
Revelation 20:1-10
May 3, 1998
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An outline of Revelation:

- 1** **Introduction/Purpose**
- 2-3** **Letters to 7 churches**
- 4-5** **A scene in heaven**
- 6-18** **Just before the end**
- 19** **Jesus comes again**
- 20-22** **The new heavens and earth**

Many people are interested in knowing the future.

They are especially interested when they are currently in trouble.

Getting sent to a specialist because your doctor saw a suspicious dark spot on your lung has a way of instantly raising your interest in the future.

The Apostle John in the book of Revelation was writing to people who were living in dangerous times - they were discriminated against even to the point of losing their jobs, their homes and some - their lives.

The future held a great deal of interest for them.

But it is not only people of John's day who were interested in what the future will bring - but people of our day - even us!

If you've ever experienced the death of a loved one or if life, in some other way, has fallen apart - you become instantly fascinated with the future.

In the book of Revelation we not only learn that in the end Jesus wins but we also learn something about how the future unfolds.

God graciously gives us some detail about what happens - and what happens to us.

I like the way the Apostle Paul said it to the Thessalonian Christians:

"We do not want you to be uninformed about those who die or to grieve like the rest of people who have no hope."

And then at God's direction, Paul spells out something of what happens to us after death.

But it is John in the book of Revelation who gives us the most information about the future.

I want you to think with me about what John has shown us thus far in our reading of this book:

In chapter 7 God assures his people present and future that they are in his keeping - that he is the sovereign Lord and no matter what happens to them in this life, they will be with him in eternity - they are in his care.

Then in chapters 8-9 John begins to describe what it will be like on this earth in the few years just preceding the second coming of Jesus.

In those days God begins to pour out his wrath on this earth and many unbelieving people are killed.

But God again assures his people that they are not the objects of his wrath.

But even though God's wrath does not fall on his own people - chapters 10 - 13 describe the ancient animosity of Satan against God and the rise of a world-wide governmental system and religion headed by the antichrist and false prophet that focuses its anger on God's people.

At that, God turns up the heat and in chapter 16 we hear of those last terrible days of God's judgment on the earth just before Jesus comes again.

In Matthew, Jesus called it a period of great tribulation and also said that God kept that time relatively short for the sake of his own people.

In chapters 17-18 and the first part of 19 we see a description of the celebration in the world over the fall of that world-wide governmental system and religion headed by the antichrist and false prophet.

That whole system of evil rule in this world is called Babylon and Babylon falls when Jesus comes again.

The last half of chapter 19 brings us then to the high point of the book - the actual return, the literal, physical second coming of Jesus to this earth.

And as we saw last week, the antichrist and the false prophet lead an army of kings and others from all over the earth to do battle with Jesus when he comes again - but with only his word - he speaks and those armies are defeated.

The antichrist and the false prophet are thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur and the rest of the armies are killed.

What happens then?

What about the dragon, the devil, Satan - his spokespeople, the antichrist and the false prophet are sent to the lake of fire but what about Satan?

And what happens to all the believers, the armies of heaven, who came with

Jesus when he returned?

And what happens to all the unbelievers, those who were already dead, those who died in that battle of Armageddon when Jesus came, and those who weren't in the battle?

Jesus comes again - is that the end of the story?

No. The last three chapters of Revelation give us much more.

Look at Revelation 21 "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away..."

In a couple of weeks we are going to see what Revelation says about what we call "heaven" - who will be in it, where is it, what will it be like.

Before that, looking at Revelation 20:11ff we will look at what happens to all the dead who have not believed God and have not trusted his way of salvation.

"If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

What is this place we call "hell"? Who goes there? And is it fair?

But let's go back even before that and pick the story up at the point where Jesus comes again. What happens next?

Chapter 19 ended with Jesus defeating the antichrist and false prophet and their armies.

Chapter 20 obviously continues the story.

There are some Christians who suggest that Chapter 20 begins by recapitulating all of church history -

as if John finishes chapter 19 by telling about Jesus' second coming and then he steps back and in 20:1-6 summarizes the great spiritual truths of Jesus' death and resurrection, where Satan is defeated and the believers' conversions in terms of being a part of Christ's kingdom.

But Chapter 20 is too obviously a continuation of the story for me to spiritualize it.

I believe John is describing actual events that are yet to come.

In chapter 19 we already heard what happened to the beast (the antichrist) and the false prophet.

I'm interested in knowing what happened to Satan himself.

Chapter 20 tells us:

Revelation 20:1-3

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is

the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.”

There is no question WHO John is telling about here!

He uses four ways to describe him so that no one can miss who is being talked about.

This is the serpent from the garden of Eden, this is the dragon of Revelation 12, this is the “devil” who tempted Jesus - this is none other than Satan himself.

Now we are about to hear what happens to Satan.

An angel comes from heaven, an angel with authority over the place where Satan reigns - the Abyss - the place where Satan’s angels exist awaiting their judgment according to Jude 6 “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home - these he has kept in darkness bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the Great Day.”

Back in chapter 9 we saw that it was from this Abyss that “locusts” came to torment people who didn’t belong to God. These locusts are described in ways that lead us to believe they are demonic angels that are loosed on the earth.

Well the angel has authority over that place and he takes Satan and binds him with chains and shuts him in the Abyss.

Whatever that place is apparently it is not a place anyone wants to go.

The demons that Jesus cast out of the Gadarene or Geresene man pleaded with Jesus to be sent anywhere except to the Abyss.

But it is to that place that Satan is consigned for a 1000 years.

There is a fair amount of language used to describe that Satan is somewhat incapacitated for that period of time.

He is bound in chains and the Abyss, into which he is thrown, is locked and sealed.

Now we know that Satan is a spirit and thus physical chains and locks would be useless - so what is the point?

Satan is seriously hindered in his ability to do what he normally does.

Specifically our text tells us he is unable to deceive the nations for this period of time.

Back in chapters 13 and 19 we learned that Satan was behind the success of the false prophet to deceive people into following the antichrist and then eventually in going up against Jesus when he returned to earth.

So the Father of lies is shut out for a while.

But when you are reading the text you can't help but notice that John said Satan was locked up "for a short time".

What happens then?

Look at verse 7

Revelation 20:7-10

"When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog - to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Now we know what happens to Satan!

The enemy of our souls, the arch foe of our lives is forever put away and punished.

There is a day coming when he will have no, hear it: "NO", power to do what he has been doing for millennia. He will be forever out of the picture.

That alone is cause for celebration.

But the text raises some interesting points of information about what happens along the way to Satan's final incarceration.

What is this about a 1000 year period of time during which Satan is in the Abyss but not yet finally put away?

What is going on in this 1000 year period of time?

And if Satan is imprisoned, where did these thousands of people come from that Satan rallies to fight against God and his people when Satan is finally released from the Abyss after 1000 years?

That brings us back to the part of the passage I skipped over in my desire to show what happens to Satan.

Verses 4-6 tell us something about what happens during the 1000 years.

But they don't tell us much!

In these verses we read that certain people "came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years"

Before we look at these verses, I want to remind you that this little phrase "came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years" has been the cause of no end of contention

between Christians for nearly 1700 years.

The thousand years is a “millennium” and Christians have differed sharply on what the millennium is, how long it is, and what happens during it.

I’m certain most of you have been exposed to terms like these in the past:

I’m a pre-millennialist.

Well, I’m a post-millennialist.

I’m not either, I’m an a-millennialist.

And then there is the wag that says he’s a pan-millennialist - he just thinks it will all “pan” out in the end.

While I sympathize with the peace-loving spirit of the “pan-millennialist”, I can’t so easily dismiss my responsibility to learn from Revelation 20.

As you can tell from the prefixes there are basic differences between the three serious positions.

The “pre” and “post” have mostly to do with the timing of Christ’s return in relationship to the millennium - that 1000 year reign of Jesus on this earth.

The “pre-millennialists” believe Jesus will come before the millennium and that his coming is what will usher in that 1000 year reign.

The “post-millennialists” believe Jesus will come after the millennium and that the millennium is a period of time before Jesus comes again and that during it, as now, Jesus is reigning from heaven.

The “a-millennialists” doesn’t believe that the 1000 years refers to a particular specific period of time but rather is a symbolic way of describing the entire period of time from the first coming of Jesus to the second coming.

They don’t believe this passage teaches a literal millennial period - thus they are “a” or “no”- millennialists.

I do not have time to adequately describe the reasons why Christians through the years have held these differing positions.

Nor do I have time to fairly represent the “post” or “a” millennialists’ positions.

As I said last week in reference to the differing views among Christians on the “rapture” so I say this week in reference to the differing views among Christians on the “millennium” - there are godly, competent, Jesus-loving, Bible-believing Christians who hold each of these views.

And my prayer is that increasingly God’s people will agree to disagree agreeably on the issue.

But having said that I want you to see what I believe the text teaches about what happens during the thousand years.

Let's read the text first:

Revelation 20:4-6

"I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ 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 are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."

I believe that what John is describing is that period of time after Satan is bound and locked in the Abyss (vv 1-3) and before Satan is released to do battle with God one more time (vv 7-10).

In other words we are talking about that period of time John calls the "thousand years".

Let me ask you what will seem like a silly but is actually an important question: How long is a thousand years?

You might think the right answer is 1000 365-day years but I think that would be wrong.

I think the right answer is, "a thousand years" is a long time.

I recently made the comment that I was a youth pastor once, about 100 years ago.

What do people assume I mean by that? That I'm over 120 years old now?

Of course not. They know I am using hyperbole to make the point that it was a long time ago that I was a youth pastor.

In the book of Revelation John uses numbers differently than some people want to think.

When he speaks of ten thousand times ten thousand standing before the throne of God in heaven he means a great number are standing there.

When he writes of 144,000 who are protected by God, he is using 12 to indicate the 12 tribes of Israel times 12 to indicate a great number times 1000 to indicate a really great number.

When he says that the persecution of God's people goes on for 3 ½ years it means a short time.

I think there is ample evidence from Scripture to prove that John is not using numbers in some precise way but is using them to indicate relative lengths of time.

I think it has been an embarrassment to the church through the years that some Christians have been literalistic about these numbers and have tried to do what Jesus specifically said not to do - they have tried to figure out exactly when Jesus is coming again.

A lot of people make a lot of money from others inappropriate curiosity as to exact timing - How many books have been purchased by Christians during every world crisis and will be purchased by Christians as the year 2000 draws near - books that tease and titillate with dates and names that there is no basis for.

For example: Not only will some try to make much about the year 2000 but others have and will continue to try to make much of the mention of Gog and Magog in 20:8.

Because Gog is mentioned in Ezekial along with two places called Meshech and Tubal, some have tried to make Meshech sound like Moscow and Tubal sound like Tobolsk both in Russia.

And because for years we loved to hate Russia - we made Russia the evil empire of the north that would attack Jesus' armies when he comes.

But the etymology alone of the words shows what utter nonsense that is.

Let's not get caught up in using words and numbers in ways that John never intended - and ways that embarrass the cause of Christ.

It is enough to say that the thousand years is a relatively long time but **exactly how long, we don't know** - God obviously didn't mean for us to know.

And so what happens during this "millennium" this relatively long period of time?

John says first that he sees thrones and those who were seated on them had been given authority to judge or rule.

Who is seated on the thrones?

John specifically mentions those Christ-followers who had been killed during the tribulation and it seems that he also mentions all those who had not followed the antichrist or false prophet - in other words all true Christians.

And he says "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

When does the Bible say that dead Christ-followers will come to life?

We looked at it last week:

I Thessalonians 4:16

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of God and with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

He said the same thing to the Corinthians. (no quotation)

Dead Christ-followers will be resurrected and **living** Christ-followers will be “changed” and together we will be caught up to meet the Lord - when?

When he comes to this earth again.

John called this in Revelation 20:5b “the first resurrection”.

I believe what John is describing in Revelation 20:4-6 is that all those, through the ages, who have believed and trusted in God, will be resurrected or raptured **when Jesus comes again** and they will be the ones who sit on the thrones - symbolic of ruling on this earth during this thousand year reign of Jesus on this earth.

Daniel predicted it.

Jesus told his disciples, Matthew 19:28 “I tell you the truth at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man (Jesus) sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Paul wrote to Corinthian Christians, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”

So what will happen during the thousand years?

All believers - Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, David, Jeremiah, Mary, Paul, Priscilla, Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Whitfield, Spurgeon, my grandmother, me and you, if you are trusting in Christ - we will be resurrected (or “changed” if we are still alive when this happens) and we will come with Christ to this earth and will reign with him for the thousand years ON THIS EARTH.

Our text, Revelation 20:5a tells us that “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.”

Next week or the week after we will look at that resurrection - the second resurrection - the resurrection of all through the ages who have not believed and followed God and his Christ.

But John doesn’t turn his attention to them just yet - **he wants to tell us a little more about those who are part of the first resurrection** - the resurrection that occurs just

as Jesus comes again.

Revelation 20:6 "Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."

John is writing to the Christians in Asia Minor but God's word can be applied to us today.

I believe John is saying no matter how difficult it becomes now or even how difficult it will become when Satan has his final push to defeat all of God's people - know this - there is coming a day when you will be resurrected or transformed into an immortal body and you will be with Jesus.

In your resurrected/transformed body you will never again be subject to death either physical or spiritual.

And furthermore, in spite of being ridiculed and discriminated against all of your life because of your faith - you will reign in this world with Christ.

One question has stood out in my mind throughout my study of this subject of the millennium: Why the millennium?

Why not Jesus comes and we go right to the judgment and then the new earth?
Why the millennium?

I cannot be dogmatic about this but let me suggest three reasons for the millennium:

1. The faithfulness of God's people is vindicated and the sovereignty of God is demonstrated in an obvious way when all unbelievers see God's people no longer suffering and persecuted but see them ruling with Christ on this earth - in the very same places where through the ages they were maligned and mistreated.
2. the patience and mercy of God and the sinfulness of human beings is demonstrated when Jesus actually comes to earth for a long period of time, rules with justice and in peace, and STILL thousands and thousands refuse him - we will look at that in a later sermon but the 1000 year refusal of Christ will only confirm the justice of God in condemning unbelievers.
3. I believe it is possible that it is during the millennium that Paul's declaration in Romans 11, of Israel's turning to Jesus in large numbers may take place.

It seems that for whatever reasons, God has determined that when Jesus comes again he will set up an earthly kingdom and believers of all the ages will rule with him. It will be a time of peace on the earth as never known before - and it will be only the beginning what is in store for those who trust in Jesus.

