



THE BOOK OF REVELATION

11: THE MILLENNIUM

Chapter 20

The Book is now swiftly running to its conclusion and to its climax. Although did John know that?! The Kingdom of God is about to come once and for all and the works of darkness are to be finally and forever vanquished and overthrown.

THE MILLENNIUM, OR THE REIGN OF A THOUSAND YEARS

There are three interpretations of the Millennium.

- **Post-Millennialism**

The belief in a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ, after [post] which Jesus will come again.

- **Pre-Millennialism**

The belief in a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ, before [pre] which Jesus will have come again.

- **Amillennialism**

The belief that the 1,000 years is symbol and metaphor and thus John is not describing a literal millennial reign of Christ. Hence the position of the Second Coming to the Millennium is irrelevant as the Millennium doesn't literally occur. The return of Christ happens without [Greek 'a'] any 1,000 year rule.

WHAT ARE THE DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE MILLENNIUM?

1. Satan is taken by a mighty angel and imprisoned in the Abyss for 1,000 years (20v1-3).
2. Satan's work of deceiving the nations is temporarily halted (20v3).
3. Those who have been faithful to Christ even unto death, find their reward: they are called '*blessed*' and '*holy*' and '*priests*' (20v4,6).
4. Christ and the martyred saints reign for 1,000 years (20v4-6).
5. After the 1,000 years are over there yet remains one final battle to be fought and one final victory to be won (20v7-10,15).
6. At the end of the Millennium, the rest of the dead are raised, some to face judgement and condemnation and others to receive their reward (20v11-15).
7. The ending is so profound that Death and Hades actually cease to exist and the beginning so complete there is a new heaven and earth (20v14; 21v1).

HOWEVER

8. There is no indication given as to whether this 1,000 year reign will take place in heaven or on earth.

JEWISH APOCALYPTIC WRITINGS

A significant number of Jewish apocalyptic writings envisage a literal reign of the Messiah and of the righteous of Israel, the length of which rule varies from 40 days to as much as 7,000 years. But as with all of Revelation, John may sometimes draw on existing understandings and imagery but forges a new and original narrative.

SO... 'POST', 'PRE', OR 'A'?

There are Scriptures which can be used to support the interpretation that John is describing a literal rule on earth, which will take place either before or after the Second Coming.

POST: e.g. 1 Cor.15v25, where Jesus appears to rule 'until' Death is also subjugated to Him.

PRE: e.g. Isa. 65v17-25, where a 'new heaven and new earth' ushers in a peaceful and idyllic existence (and see Isa.2v2-5; Mic.4v1-5; Isa.11v1-10; 35v1-10; 1 Cor.15v25).

However any Post-Millennial understanding seems to founder on the one unavoidable rock: which is that the New Testament clearly says that the Second Coming will be preceded and accompanied by an unprecedented outburst of Satanic activity. Far from being imprisoned and powerless Satan will be alive and well and very active (e.g. Mt.24 and especially verses 21-22: *'For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equalled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.'* Which is surely the picture portrayed in Rev.13.

Any Pre-Millennial understanding seems to run into the difficulty of interpreting the O.T. promises, which were poetry when they were first uttered, as now being a factual and actual description of what will be. And the N.T. seems to say quite clearly that when Jesus comes again: *'Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet" (1 Cor.15v24-27).* There is no final last gasp of Satan or of sinful humanity, nor no intermediate rule before the final reign of Christ...

And with both Post and Pre, if there were not these 6 verses in Revelation, would we naturally interpret 1 Cor.15v25 as indicating a Millennial reign of Christ?

Also, then there is this talk of 'thrones'. John writes about 'thrones' over 40 times in his Apocalypse and apart from Satan's throne and the throne of the Beast (2v13; 13v2; 16v10), every other time that a throne is mentioned it is situated in Heaven and never on the earth. And see Eph.2v6 for a spiritual truth not an actual physical truth.

And then there is the question as to what is the exact purpose of this Millennial reign before the final resurrection and thus before the reward given to the rest of the believers? What does it do and for whom? Of course it takes grace and courage to give up one's life for love of Jesus, as the martyrs have done but it also takes a particular grace and courage to live and to endure under persecution, even if the ultimate price is not required. And if this first reign is only for the martyred, then is that not as if Peter and Paul (both killed under Nero's persecution) would be reigning but Matthew or John would have to wait another 1,000 years?

The Amillennial interpretation seems to do justice to the understanding that the Book of Revelation is symbol and not an actual description of literal events. The eternal truths that it contains - the eternal lordship and victory of Christ; the triumph of the saints; the downfall of Satan, are clothed in powerful cartoon-like images but they are not meant to be taken literally. And thus if all the rest is symbol, can we arbitrarily take six verses and insist that they are to be taken literally? Similarly in Revelation, numbers have symbolic meaning and are not meant to be taken at face value. And so 1,000 is 3 (a sacred number) and 7 (another sacred number) = 10, which is then cubed.

BUT if that leaves us with an Amillennial understanding of the Millennium and that the 1,000 years is symbolic, then the question inevitably arises: symbolic of what?

Maybe here are some clues:

Revelation is always about revealing the hidden spiritual truths and realities behind earthly events.

The focus of the Millennial rule is actually not so much upon the reign of Christ but upon the glorious and privileged reign of the martyrs, taking the more obvious reading of v.4 as referring to one and the same group of people (seated on thrones and reigning) and not to two separate groups. We are taken back to earlier in the Book, to chapters 6 and 7 and to the martyrs standing before the Lord in Heaven (6v9-11; 7v9-10,13-17).

'When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (6v9-11).

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. '(7v13-17)

Compare these verses in chapter 7 with the picture given in chapter 12v17; 13v1-7, 13-17: [The Beast] *'was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them'* (13v7)

The apparent reality as perceived from the earth and the true reality as seen from Heaven.

The Saints are:-

Powerless	Defeated	Persecuted	Imprisoned	Despised	Destroyed	In Satan's power
Powerful	Victorious	Ruling	Satan is imprisoned	Glorious	Alive for evermore	Untouched & Untouchable

So for a moment John pauses to show us the true state of those who have died for their love of Jesus and then returns to the earth where Satan is loosed and the enemies of God gather for the final battle and for God's final victory.



GOG AND MAGOG

Gog and Magog appear in Gn.10v2 and 1 Chron.1v5 where Magog is a son or a descendant of Japheth, one of the sons of Noah. They also appear in Ezek.38 and Ezek.39, where Gog is a ruler and Magog is a country. In later Judaism Gog and Magog came to represent two leaders and in apocalyptic writings they symbolised the forces of evil. Ezekiel, in language absolutely echoed in Rev.20, describes them as gathering a vast army from the ends of the earth to march against the people of God, only to be utterly annihilated. So *'Gog and Magog'* mean the assembled forces of sinful humanity arrayed against God and against the people of God.

The Millennial rule of the Lord and of His saints and the binding of Satan also reveals that God's judgements are just and righteous. After a totally perfect rule of 1,000 years and after the complete absence of any Satanic activity whatsoever, humankind (so deceivable and so eager to be deceived!) leaps to embrace sin as soon as it may. That Satan is described as the deceiver of the world takes us right back to the first deception in the Garden of Eden. Both then and at the Millennium, a world of perfection and of blessing is rejected in preference for what the Devil offers. Truly *'men loved darkness rather than light...'*



THE ABYSS

The thought was of a huge underground cavern where the disobedient spirits awaited judgement (Jude 6; Lk.8v31; Rom.10v7; 1 Ptr.3v19-20; Ps.71v20). Hence it is also described in Rev.20v7 as Satan's 'prison'. This idea of a prison for the wicked was also taken up in other Jewish writings: Jub. 5v6: [referring to the punishment of the angels of Gn.6v1-2] *'And against the angels whom He had sent upon the earth, He [God] was very angry, and commanded that all their power and authority be taken from them. And He commanded that they should be bound in the depths of the earth...'*

It is from the Abyss that the demonic 'locusts' appeared and from whence the Beast arose (9v1-11; 11v7; 17v8). Yet this habitation of the demonic is in fact under the authority and power of God, as demonstrated by the key and by the chain that the angel carries and by the fact that Satan is imprisoned there and cannot break free but only be released for a time (20v1-3,7). The Abyss is ruled over by the '*angel of the Abyss*', whose name is '*Abaddon* (cf Job 28v22; 31v12) or *Apollyon*', which means '*Destroyer*' (9v11).



THE FIRST RESURRECTION & THE SECOND DEATH

It is the righteous dead of 20v4-6 who partake of this '*first resurrection*'. We need to resist the idea that this '*first resurrection*' is a spiritual rebirth whereas the second, just a few verses later, is bodily. Both are either spiritual (which they are not), or they are both bodily, (which they clearly are).

Perhaps the most logical understanding of the '*first resurrection*' and of its relationship to the '*second death*' is this: the '*second death*' is eternal death, following a first death, which is physical death. Those who have already given up their lives for Christ i.e. those who are believers, have already passed from death to eternal life (cf Jn.5v24). However in the general resurrection, foretold in 20v11-15 both the righteous and the unrighteous will be raised up, the one to reward, the other to eternal death (20v11-12,15). Thus the second death will clearly have power over some who are caught up in this second resurrection, unlike the believers who are already reigning with Christ in Heaven and over whom the '*second death*' has no power.

So this is symbol, demonstrating the absolute security of the saints, who received eternal life when they believed in Christ and who kept the faith. The Bible does not teach that there are two resurrections, only the one.



DEATH & HADES & THE LAKE OF FIRE

Death and Hades are seen as being inseparable companions – '*I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him*' (6v8). It is Death which is the fabled '*last enemy*' to be conquered by Jesus (1 Cor.15v25-26).

For the ending of Death is the ending of all sin for all time (cf Rom.6v23).

Hades is often connected with the Abyss (Ps.71v20; Rom.10v7) and Jesus holds the keys to it i.e. holds authority over life and death (Rev.1v18). Hades is perceived as being the dwelling place of the unrighteous, awaiting the great day of judgement (e.g. Lk.16v23 and Acts2v27,31 – where the righteous and holy one is not '*abandoned to the grave*' [lit.'*Hades*'] i.e. it is not the destination of the godly). In the O.T. the word used for this place is '*Sheol*' whereas in the N.T. it is replaced by the Greek word '*Hades*'.

In apocalyptic literature the '*Lake of Fire*' (19v20; 20v10, 15) is Gehenna. '*Gehenna*' derives its name from the Valley of Hinnom, which was situated outside Jerusalem and where in past years children had been sacrificed to the god Molech (2 Kngs 23v10; 2 Chron.28v3; 33v6; Jer.7v31-32; 32v25). With such an evil history it became a symbol of judgement. It also became the city's rubbish dump and it was a place where one could find scores of fires burning day and night as people disposed of the rot and the decay. Hence Jesus' words, '*If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell* [lit.Gehenna], *where the fire never goes out* (Mk.9v43).

That the the Lake of Fire is clearly symbolic, is seen in that Death and Hades are cast into it. But the real tragedy of Gehenna is that it was never meant for humanity, only for Satan and his angels: '*Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*' (Mt.25v41).

But, by God's wonderful grace, that is not the destination of those who have been saved by the Lamb!