

THE MILLENNIUM OF REVELATION 20

– PART 2

INTRODUCTION

- Revelation 20 is the most significant biblical passage in the debate over the timing and nature of the millennium
- There are 4 key theological issues that must be addressed in this chapter:
 1. The Timing of Satan’s Binding
 2. The Duration of the Thousand Years
 3. The Nature of the First Resurrection
 4. The Chronology of John’s Visions
- How each of these issues is viewed affects a person’s eschatological position:

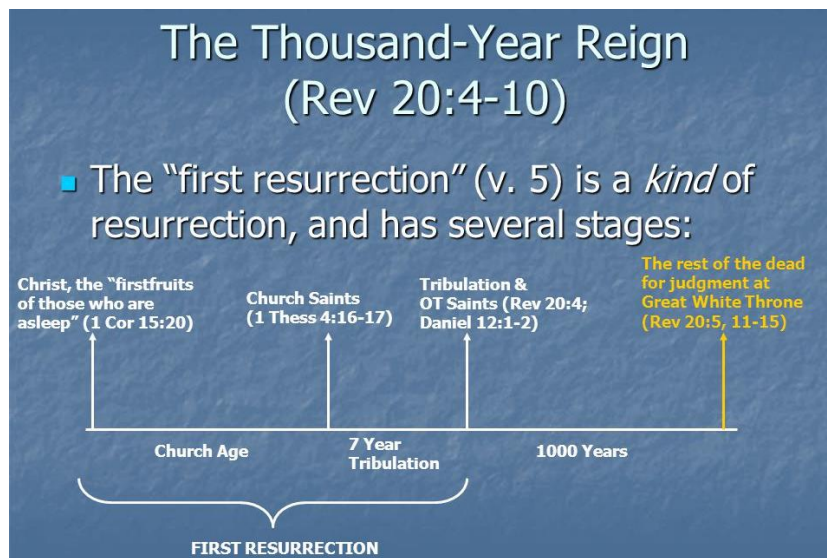
EXGETICAL ISSUE	Amill	Premill
1. Satan’s Binding	Present	Future
2. Thousand Years	Symbolic	Literal
3. First Resurrection	Spiritual	Physical
4. Chronology of 19-20	Recapitulatory	Sequential

THE RESURRECTION OF TRIBULATION SAINTS & THE REIGN OF CHRIST

Revelation 20:4-6 ~ Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their 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 on their forehead and on their hand; and 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 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.

- Some initial observations:
 - John saw “thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them” (v. 4)
 - John apparently was not told the identity of the individuals seated on the thrones but evidently they do not include the martyred dead themselves; this
 - Christ had predicted in Luke 22:29–30 that the 12 disciples would “eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.”
 - Since the disciples are part of the church, it would make sense for them to sit on these thrones
 - John saw “the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their 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 on their forehead and on their hand” (v. 4)
 - This group apparently includes those saints you were martyred in the Tribulation for their refusal to worship the beast; they were previously referred to in Rev 6:9; 7:9-17
 - These Tribulation saints were resurrected and “they came to life” (v. 4)

- While church saints will have already been raised at the Rapture, this group of Tribulation saints will be raised at the return of Christ (in fulfillment of John 5:29)
- These resurrected Tribulation saints will “reign with Christ for a thousand years” (v. 4)
 - They will reign with Christ along with the church saints and OT saints
- This resurrection is called the “first resurrection” (v. 5b)
 - It first in kind not first in chronology since numerous others will have been previously resurrected in the “first” resurrection (Christ, those who were resurrected at Christ’s resurrection – Matt 27:52-53, church saints, etc.)
 - “At the end of the church age the rapture of the church will take place, and the dead in Christ will be raised. At the end of the great tribulation, the tribulation saints will also be raised from the dead. It would seem clear from these facts that the term ‘the first resurrection’ is not an event but an order of resurrection including all the righteous who are raised from the dead before the millennial kingdom begins. They are ‘first’ in contrast to those who are raised last, after the millennium, when the wicked dead are raised and judged. Just as there are two kinds of physical death, namely, the first death which results in burial, and the second death which is described as being cast into the lake of first (20:14), so there are two kinds of resurrection, a first resurrection having to do with the resurrection of the righteous, and a second resurrection having to do with the wicked. They are separated by at least one thousand years. Just as the first death did not occur to all in one moment but is experienced individually by those who die over a long period of time, so the first resurrection is fulfilled according to the groups that are in view.”¹



- “Blessed and holy” are those who are raised at Christ’s 2nd coming because “over these the second death has no power” and because they “will reign with Him for a thousand years” (v. 6)
- In contrast to the martyred dead raised at the return of Christ, the “rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed” (v. 5a)
 - This phrase is parenthetical:

Revelation 20:4c-5 ~ ...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 completed.) This is the first resurrection.
 - This is a reference to the resurrection of all the wicked of all time for the Great White Throne Judgment described in vv. 11-15

¹ John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 298-299.

- Although those who die without Christ immediately go into hell (an intermediate state), a day is coming when their bodies will be raised and they will receive new bodies fit especially for experiencing the horrors of hell forever

The Nature of the First Resurrection

- The key question is this: Is the “first resurrection” physical or spiritual?
- Comparison of views:

Millennial View	First Resurrection	Second Resurrection
Premillennialism:	<i>Physical</i> Resurrection of the Righteous from the Tribulation	Physical Resurrection of the Wicked
Amillennialism:	<i>Spiritual</i> Resurrection of the Righteous	Physical Resurrection of Righteous and Wicked

- The key distinction between these views is that Premillennialism views the first resurrection as physical; whereas, Amillennialism views the first resurrection as spiritual
- “Amillennialists and Postmillennialists reject this idea of two physical resurrections separated by a thousand years, insisting instead that ‘the first resurrection’ at the beginning of the thousand years is not physical but rather spiritual. They explain the spiritual nature of this resurrection in various ways, but the most common view is that the first resurrection refers to the regeneration of believers at the point of conversion. In this way, the first resurrection takes place during the present age when those who are spiritually dead are made alive in Christ (John 5:25; Eph 2:4-6; Col 2:12-13; 1 John 3:14) and live to reign with Him in the present millennial kingdom.”²
- “[A]millennialists reject this idea of two physical resurrections separated by a thousand years, insisting instead that the first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection that takes place throughout the present age. More specifically, amillennialists interpret the first resurrection as either (a) the regeneration of believers at the point of conversion or (b) the entrance of believers into life in heaven at the point of death. In doing so, amillennialists argue for a single, physical resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked when Jesus returns at the end of the age.”³

The Premillennial Position

A. The Use of the Word “Resurrection”

- The word translated “resurrection” (*anastasis*) in v. 5 is used 39 times in the NT outside of Revelation and 38 times it refers to a physical resurrection (Luke 2:34 is the exception where it is used metaphorically)
- It is never used to regeneration (i.e. the coming alive of those who are spiritually dead)
- Although not conclusive, this does place the burden of proof on those who deny that this refers to a physical resurrection

² Matthew Waymeyer, “What About Revelation 20?,” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans*, ed. by John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, 128.

³ Matthew Waymeyer, “The First Resurrection in Revelation 20,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, 27/1, Spring 2016, 4.

B. The Confirmation of the Immediate Context

- The repetition of the same form of the same verb (*ezesan* – “they came to life”) in both verses 4 and 5 indicates that both resurrections must be physical
- Interpreters agree that the phrase “the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed” in v. 5a refers to a physical resurrection
- And because John uses the exact same word in v. 4, it stands to reason that this “first resurrection” must also be a physical resurrection
- Thus, premillennialism doesn’t have the problem of the same word being used in the same context with two entirely different meanings...it sees the verb *ezesan* as referring to a physical resurrection in both verses – a resurrection of the righteous in v. 4 and a resurrection of the wicked in v. 5
- Furthermore, the subjects of this resurrection are those who were martyred which strongly implied that this new life is physical
- Two physical resurrections are clearly in view:

First Resurrection: “they came to life [*ezesan*] and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Rev 20:4)

Second Resurrection: “the rest of the dead did not come to life [*ezesan*] until the thousand years were completed” (Rev 20:5a)

C. The Duration of the Saints’ Reign

- John is very clear in vv. 4, 6 (“and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years...and will reign with Him for a thousand years”) that the entire group of individuals who are raised in the first resurrection are resurrected together at the beginning of the Millennium and reign together with Christ for the entire thousand years
- John uses an accusative of time (“thousand years”) which indicates that the saints will reign with Christ for the entirety of the thousand years
- This same accusative of time is used in v. 2 in reference to Satan’s binding (i.e. he will be bound for the entire thousand-year period)
- If John wanted to communicate that the saints would reign during the thousand years (as opposed to its entirety), he would have used a genitive of time
- “And why is this a problem for amillennialism? Because neither of its two views of the first resurrection is compatible with John’s description of the saints being raised at the start of the millennium and reigning together for the entirety of the thousand years. According to the view that the first resurrection equals regeneration, believers are regenerated throughout the thousand years so that the entrance of these saints into their reign is distributed throughout the millennium. In this scenario, those saints who are saved during the present age do not reign for the entirety of the thousand years—as John says they will—and some of them do not begin their reign until the millennium is almost over. Similarly, according to the view that the first resurrection refers to believers entering the intermediate state at the point of death, the entrance of these saints into their reign is also distributed throughout the millennial period. In this scenario, believers do not live in heaven and reign with Christ for the entire thousand years, and some of them do not begin their reign

until the millennium is nearly completed. Again, neither of these scenarios is compatible with John’s description in Revelation 20:4-6.”⁴

- John is being grammatically precise here...and the resurrection of the martyred saints at the beginning of the millennium to reign with Christ for the entirety of the thousand years fits perfectly with premillennialism

D. The Timing of Spirit’s Regeneration

- If the first resurrection did refer to regeneration (as amillennialists argue) the individuals described in v. 4 are not regenerated by the Holy Spirit until after they are martyred
- Notice the order in v. 4: martyred first...then come to life
- It would be absurd to think that they would be regenerated after they were martyred for Christ!

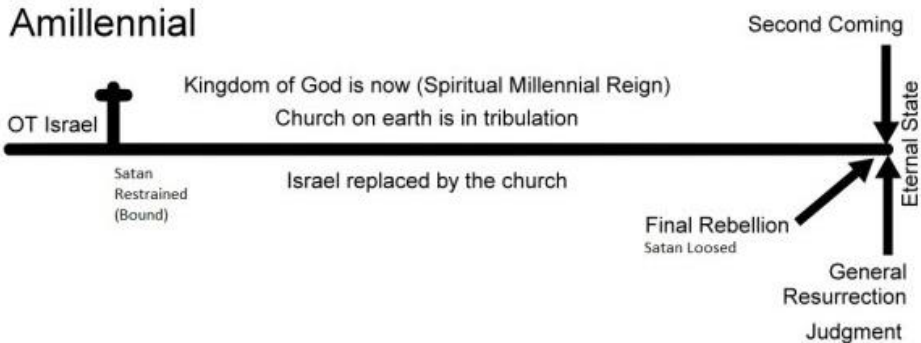
The Amillennial Objection

- The primary objection to the premillennial position on the first resurrection is that elsewhere the Bible speaks of a single, general resurrection in which the righteous and the wicked will be raised at the same time

Daniel 12:2 ~ Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

John 5:28-29 ~ Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and all will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

Acts 24:15 ~ having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.



- The Premillennial response:
 - Those passages do not actually preclude the possibility of two distinct resurrections separated by a thousand years
 - All of those passages teach a resurrection of the righteous and the wicked – and always in that same order (as Revelation 20 describes it)
 - They don’t state or require that the two resurrections happen at the same time
 - “It is helpful to remember that later revelation in Scripture will sometimes clarify that there is actually a gap of time that separates two events predicted in earlier revelation – two events that initially appeared as if they would occur at the same time. For example, there is no clear evidence in

⁴ Matthew Waymeyer, <https://thecripplegate.com/amillennialism-revelation-20-and-the-importance-of-grammatical-precision/> (accessed February 11, 2020)

the Old Testament alone that there would be two separate coming of the Messiah separated by a significant period of time. But once you come to the later revelation of the New Testament, you realize that what the Old Testament writers seemed to depict as a single event must now be recognized as involving two events.”⁵

- This is known as prophetic telescoping or foreshortening



- Through the progress of revelation, we find that, though a resurrection of the righteous and wicked appears to be an event that occurs at the same time, a thousand years actually separates those two resurrections

The Length of the Millennium

- The word “thousand years” is *chilia*
- *Chiliasm* = The doctrine stating that Jesus will reign on earth for 1,000 years
- This word is used 6 times in 7 verses (vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)
- The key question is this: Should the number “one thousand” be understood literally or symbolically?
- Comparison of views:

Millennial View	Literal		Symbolic
Premillennialism:	X	or	X
Amillennialism:			X

- “This raises the question of whether the thousand years in Revelation 20 should be understood literally or figuratively. The significance of this question is obvious: if the thousand years is literal, it cannot refer to the present age, which is already nearly two thousand years long, and therefore it must refer to a period of time that is future.”⁶

The Amillennial Position

- Amillennialists take the thousand years as symbolic of the time period between the first and second comings of Christ
- They say it is a symbolic number, spanning the entire church age
- They make their case using the following arguments:

⁵ Waymeyer, “What About Revelation 20?,” 130.

⁶ Ibid., 131.

A. The Symbolic Nature of Revelation

- They say that, because of the symbolic nature of Revelation, the thousand years should be understood symbolically, representing an indefinitely long period of time
- The frequent use of types and figures in the book argues against taking the term literally

B. The Symbolism of the Immediate Context

- The presence of many figurative words in Revelation 20 (i.e. “chain, abyss, serpent, beast”) demands that the numbers in the chapter also be taken figuratively

The Premillennial Response

A. Most of the Numbers in Revelation Should be Taken Literally

- Of the 254 numbers mentioned in the book, most are intended to be understood literally
- Furthermore, “[w]henver a number is used with a time indicator in Revelation—such as days (1:10; 2:10, 13; 4:8; 6:17; 7:15; 8:12; 9:6, 15; 10:7; 11:3, 6, 9, 11; 12:6, 10; 14:11; 16:14; 18:8; 20:10; 21:25) or months (9:5, 10, 15; 11:2; 13:5; 22:2)—there is no clear indication that it is symbolic.”⁷

B. The Literal Use of the Number Elsewhere in Scripture

- Its usage in 2 Peter 3:8; Revelation 11:3; 12:6; 14:20 should be taken literally

C. The Use of Indefinite Expressions of Time in Revelation

- Had John wanted to communicate an indefinite period of time, he could have used phrases used elsewhere in the book:
 - “for a little while longer” (6:11)
 - “a short time” (12:12)
 - “a little while” (17:10)
 - “for a short time” (20:3)

D. The Different Approaches in Interpreting Revelation

- Premillennial Approach: Assume the language is literal unless the nature of the language forces a symbolic interpretation
- Amillennial Approach: Assume the language is symbolic unless the nature of the language forces a literal interpretation
- Three questions should be asked when determining if a passage should be interpreted symbolically:⁸
 1. Does it possess a degree of absurdity when taken literally?
 2. Does it possess a degree of clarity when taken symbolically?
 3. Does it fall into an established category of symbolic language (i.e. simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, anthropomorphism)?
- Truly symbolic passages will meet all three of these criteria

⁷ Taken from Matthew Waymeyer, TES Premillennialism Seminar Session 2 notes

⁸ Adapted from Waymeyer, “What About Revelation 20?,” 132.

- However, the thousand years of Revelation 20 meet none of those three criteria
- The obvious conclusion: The thousand years of Revelation 20 should be taken literally
- John’s six-fold use of the specific number “thousand years” only argues for this fact

THE FINAL REBELLION

Revelation 20:7-10 ~ When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 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. 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. 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.

- As predicted in v. 3, Satan will be released from the abyss at the end of the Millennium (v. 7)
- He will “deceive the nations...to gather them together for the war” (v. 8)
- The war will constitute Satan’s final attempt to destroy Christ
- He will apparently find many people to follow his deception since “the number of them is like the sand of the seashore” (v. 8)
- Where will this large number of followers of Satan come from? → “In the space of a thousand years there can be thirty or forty generations of people. When the Millennium begins, people with earthly bodies will enter it, but apparently none of them will be unsaved at the very beginning. But quite soon (perhaps in the first minutes) babies will be born, and in a thousand years many children will come into the world, grow up, and live unusually long lives. All of them will be obliged to give outward allegiance to Christ, who reigns on the throne, but as in every age He will not compel them to believe in their hearts. Consequently, there will be many living who have never turned to Christ for salvation, though they have obeyed Him as Head of the government. These will seize on the chance to give expression to the rebellion of their hearts when Satan arises to be their leader in this last revolt.”⁹
- This rebellion reveals man’s sinful, unregenerate heart (even in a perfect environment) and that, when given the chance to rebel against the Lord God, sinful man will do it every time
- Once again the entire earth (“four corners of the earth” – v. 8) will rebel and invade “the beloved city,” Jerusalem (v. 9)
- “Gog and Magog” are names of ancient enemies of the Lord; here probably used to refer to those who rebel against Christ at the end of the Millennium
- This assault on Jerusalem will be patterned after the invasion described in Ezekiel 38-39 which describes the battle at the end of the Tribulation
- This rebellion will be short-lived and completely unsuccessful because they will be put to death quickly by an act of God, which will send fire down out of heaven to devour them (v. 9)
- Satan will be cast into the lake of fire where he will endure God’s judgment and wrath for eternity (v. 10)
- Contrary to the Recapitulation view (which views Revelation 20 as taking the reader back to the beginning of the present age), the description of the lake of fire in v. 10 suggests a sequential relationship between Rev 19 and 20

⁹ Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, 160.

- This is evident from the fact that the beast and the false prophet will be thrown alive into the lake of fire at the time of the second coming (Rev 19:20)
- Then, at the conclusion of the thousand years, Satan will be cast into the same lake of fire “where the beast and the false prophet are also” (Rev 20:10)
- The most natural way to read Rev 19-20 then is to see a chronological sequence between these two chapters

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

Revelation 20:11-15 ~ Then 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. 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. 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. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

- At the end of the thousand years, all dead unbelievers will be raised to life (second resurrection) – v. 5a
- They will be forced to face Christ, who is described as sitting on the great white throne
- Earth and heaven fled away from Him, describing the sinful universe going out of existence...an event Peter described in 2 Peter 3:10-13
- Jesus also described this moment in Matthew 24:35 ~ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away
- This is the judgment of unbelievers that have died and are being sentenced to eternal punishment
- This is the “day of judgment” often referred to in Scripture

Matthew 10:15 ~ Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

Matthew 12:36 ~ But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment

Acts 17:31 ~ because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

Romans 2:5 ~ 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.

Hebrews 9:27 ~ And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

Jude 6 ~ And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day,

- All those who died without Christ are raised so they are “standing before the throne” – as if to be sentenced
- Two categories of books are present:
 - Book (singular) – book of life – it contains names of the redeemed; this book will not contain the name of anyone who will be at this judgment
 - Books (plural) – book of works; contains a record of all the sinful words, thoughts, and deeds done by sinful men; men will be condemned on the basis of these books as their deeds will be compared to God’s righteous and holy standard and found wanting; they will be judged “according to their deeds” (vv. 12, 13)

- “the sea, death, Hades” (v. 13) - All the places that have held the bodies of the unrighteous dead will yield up those bodies to be judged
- “second death” (v. 14) - The first death is spiritual and physical, the second is eternal in the lake of fire, the final, eternal hell
- All those not found in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire, the final hell, along with death and Hades itself (vv. 14-15)
- 3 types of death in Scripture:
 1. Spiritual – separation of person from God; Solution: salvation
 2. Physical – temporary separation of soul from body; Solution: resurrection
 3. Eternal – eternal separation of person from God; Solution: none