

The Millennium—Revelation 20:1-3—10/8/2017
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Open to Revelation 20 & let's read this chapter as we've reached the promised earthly kingdom of Jesus in our trek through this book.

Follow along with me as I read Revelation 20:1-15. [READ]

Counting sermons introducing the book of Revelation, I have preached 75 sermons in our series studying through this last book of the Bible.

I'm certain that neither you nor I can recall all the details & drama we've learned verse by verse through 19 chapters.

But I pray that we've been challenged & changed by God's Word & that we can remember some of the big emphases.

The book overall is about Jesus coming to reign on earth in the kingdom promised throughout Scripture.

It's about Jesus not only as the Savior who came to die for sinners & thus have His heel bruised by the serpent who was Satan.

That promise of Genesis 3:15 was fulfilled in Jesus' 1st Coming & He arose to prove that the devil & death had been crushed.

Revelation expands the fulfillment of that first promise to show Jesus' 2nd Coming to crush Satan & his earthly dominion literally & finally.

Chapters 6-19 detail that judgment on the devil's domain even as he will be cast out of heaven & allowed only a short time.

I trust you've caught the sequential indicators, the chronological phrases like "*after these things*" as we saw to begin chapter 19.

We see another connector—"then I saw"—to begin chapter 20 to continue that flow from one vision & segment to the next.

Of course, we have seen some "meanwhile sections" that step out of the sequence to give more details of the characters of the Tribulation.

Yet it's all been building to the return of Jesus the King to cleanse the earth & set up His kingdom with His saints.

At Jesus' return, the antichrist will be thrown into the lake of fire along with the false prophet that did signs to point people to follow him.

And all the kings of the earth who were gathered under them will be killed along with their armies at Armageddon.

Jesus will speak & His enemies will die & that will end the battle.

The only ones left will be believers, many of them ethnic Israelites, whom God has protected through the Tribulation.

Only those who came to faith in Christ & survived will be left.

All unbelievers will be removed by death at Armageddon or by the sheep & goat judgment predicted in Matthew 25:31-46.

But the chief enemy of God will still be loose on earth.

So Revelation 20 picks up the narrative of future events to imprison the god of this world as 2nd Corinthians 4:4 calls him.

Revelation 20 continues the future chronology with the capture of the prince of the power of the air & the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience as Ephesians 2:2 calls him.

We reach the earthly climax as Revelation 20 reaches the millennium, the time period when Satan is bound in the abyss & saints reign with Jesus on earth.

So as we transition into this chapter from all the prior buildup, let's note a 1st point today about the millennium.

I'm going to offer you 3 descriptions of the millennium from Revelation 20:1-3 to lift our minds to what lies ahead for us.

We'll note 3 descriptions of the millennium that help us grasp it more fully from Scripture & look forward to it more fully with joy.

And the 1st point to note comes from the buildup of chapter 19 into chapter 20, from the return of King Jesus with His saints to defeat His earthly enemies & prepare for His kingdom.

#1—Understand the millennium is Jesus' promised earthly kingdom.

Point #1 today is this—understand that the millennium is Jesus' promised earthly kingdom.

Look back at Revelation 19:11 to meet Jesus again. [READ]

This is Jesus returning from heaven—coming out of heaven & coming again to judge righteously & win against evil.

And look at verse 14 to see those coming with Him. [READ]

Saints will be coming back with Jesus out of heaven & clearly their destination is the earth in the verses that follow.

Verses 15-21 mention earthly nations & earthly birds & earthly kings & earthly horses & earthly men & people & the earthly antichrist beast & earthly false prophet & an earthly war & earthly victory.

So when we reach Revelation, the focus is on earth.

Revelation 12:9-12 foretold that the dragon, who is Satan, will be cast down from heaven to earth with great wrath for only a short time.

That short time will be the final 3 ½ years of the Tribulation.

And it will all be on earth—that's all the devil will have access to then.

So when we read in Revelation 20:1-3 about the devil being bound for a thousand years, he must be scooped up from the earth somehow for the earth to be free of him for that time.

That's why I want to emphasize that the millennium is Jesus' promised EARTHLY kingdom—that this kingdom is on earth.

All the flow of Revelation is judgment on earth so that Jesus comes back to earth & the devil is taken from earth.

This is not yet the new heavens & the new earth—those come in the next chapters—in Revelation 21-22.

OT prophecies do mix future aspects of the millennium & the new heavens & new earth together, but these final chapters clearly show a chronology from one to the other.

Revelation 20 shows us that this is an earthly kingdom that Jesus comes back to take for His own & rule perfectly in.

When we understand it that way, we also understand how this millennium is the PROMISED earthly kingdom, the rule of the Saving Messiah King as was promised.

So the millennium is not merely an earthly kingdom for Jesus because that's a fun & fitting way to end the story.

God didn't get to this part of the book or story & think He needed to add a nice happy ending with no prior planning.

This was promised to Abraham's seed in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed as Genesis 12:1-3 testifies.

That promise was passed to Isaac & Jacob & Jacob's son Judah was promised to rule with an iron scepter in Genesis 49:10.

That promise of a ruling descendant of Judah passed down to David whom God promised in 2nd Samuel 7 to give a throne forever.

That King is God's Son in Psalm 2, the Messiah & Righteous Branch of Jesse & Ruler of the future restored remnant.

John MacArthur's commentary on this passage lists 26 OT references to the promised earthly kingdom fulfilled in the millennium. [Deuteronomy 30:1-5; 2nd Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 2:6-12; Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:1-10; 12:1-6; 24:23; 32:15-20; 35:1-2; 60:10-18; 65:20-22; Jeremiah 3:14-18; 23:5-6; 30:3; 31:35-40; 33:14-18; Ezekiel 34:23-24; 36:16-38; 37:15-28; Daniel 2:44-45; Hosea 3:4-5; Joel 3:18-21; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-8; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Zechariah 14:9-11]

So I can't list them all, but listen to one & ponder if it has been fulfilled yet & what it must look like for it to be fulfilled.

Listen to Isaiah 11:1-10—*"Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³ And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; ⁴ But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. ⁵ Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist. ⁶ And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. ⁷ Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. Then in that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be ² glorious."*

I'm not thinking we've seen that fulfilled yet—right?

Just the picture of a nursing child playing by the hole of the cobra scares me to death every time I read it.

But wolves don't dwell with lambs & leopards don't lie down with goats & carnivores don't become herbivores unless Jesus shows up & does something radical on earth by His presence.

And this will be on earth with nations where judgment is still needed.

So this must not be the new heavens & new earth yet.

And the branch from the root of Jesse, who was David's dad, will be the Spirit-empowered King in those glorious days on earth.

That Branch is the ultimate Son of David whose name is Jesus.

Jesus' presence must transform life as we know it on earth & bring some freedom that creation groans for according to Romans 8:22.

So kids—if you like visiting the zoo & seeing videos of animals, you want to be ready for the millennium because Jesus' kingdom on earth will make even animals peaceful.

And for all of us who sorrow over mass shootings & racism & terrorism & injustice & who long for law & order & peace & justice, we can know that Jesus' kingdom will bring it all.

As Isaiah 9:6 says, the government will be upon His shoulders.

So the millennium will belong to Jesus—and it will be His kingdom because He's the king & it's the domain of His rule.

His rule will be on earth as that's where He's returning to just as He promised repeatedly in Scripture.

So, #1, understand the millennium is Jesus' promised earthly kingdom.

Now the next point actually gets us into chapter 20 more.

Point #2—understand that the millennium is a future 1000 years.

I know I've said that enough before & that point seems obvious from all I've said & from what the text says 6 times.

But I need to say it because it's a point of dispute that divides faithful, Bible-believing Christians into 3 general views of the end times.

So point #2—understand the millennium is a future 1000 years.

Understand that the millennium is 1000 years & that it is in the future.

We covered this when introducing our study of Revelation & we've noted it at times along the way through the book.

But here & now, without a doubt, in Revelation 20 we need to let the plain sense make good sense & not look for any other sense.

We need to let a literal approach to interpretation guide us.

I don't mean a wooden literalism that sees no figures of speech or that leaves no room for symbolism or similes or metaphors.

But when we try to understand it literally first, Revelation 20 describes this period of time as 1000 years a full 6 times.

There are no comparative words or symbolic keys for the 1000 years.

In contrast, the 1000 years are described as a distinct time that has a beginning & has an end & has clear purposes.

So now let's read Revelation 20:1-7 again & watch for the 6 times & the before, during & after descriptions. [READ]

Verse 2 says Satan will be bound FOR a thousand years—that's a time designation.

Then verse 3 says Satan will stay bound UNTIL the thousand years are completed, again that's a time description.

And verse 3 ends by saying that AFTER these things Satan is released & there we have another clear time chronology phrase.

We see similar phrases in verse 4 & verse 6—for a thousand years, and in verse 5—until the thousand years were completed & in verse 7—when the thousand years are completed.

So let's clearly establish that the millennium is a time period, a phase of real time with events before, during & after.

It's clearly a time period & it's clearly said to be 1000 years & that is explicitly stated 6 times in this section describing it.

That makes sense of promises of a future restored kingdom for Israel in Romans 9-11 & elsewhere as well.

And when you read Ezekiel 40-48 about a future temple & such, the only answer that makes sense is that it will be in the millennium.

Jesus is coming back for a promised kingdom on earth & that will be a future millennium, a future 1000 years.

I make this 2nd point that may seem obvious because among Christians you will find 3 ways of interpreting these 1000 years.

I don't think those 3 ways of interpreting it are all equal or right, but you will find all 3 of them among genuine Christians.

Those differences do not make them heretics to be separated from as if eschatological details are the same as essential doctrines.

But the reality is God has spoken & meant one thing & we need to do the hard work of discerning what His Word says.

We can agree or disagree lovingly with other believers & we should not shy away from taking a clear position if we've studied in depth.

As I've said before, I understand that it *feels* easier to say I am 'PRO-millennial', meaning I am FOR the millennium whatever it is because that seems less controversial and more unifying.

And I understand that it IS easier to say I am "PAN-millennial" because it's all going to PAN out in the end and we can all agree on that and we don't have to argue over details.

But the problem is that God didn't merely reveal to us that we should be for the millennium as what will pan out in the end.

God revealed details about the future and He gave us His Word to study and understand as much as we can about His plans.

Sure it's hard work to think of all the questions that arise from just one chapter & to research how this connects with what the rest of the Bible teaches in the big picture & the details.

It takes diligent mental labor & prayer & a gracious explanation.

But study of Revelation & all of Scripture leads me to the PRE-millennial, the view that the millennium is a future 1000 years.

The premillennial view is that we are living now before the millennium and that Christ will return before the millennium.

The prefix 'PRE-' means before because Revelation 19-20 teach that Jesus will come back to earth before this kingdom.

Premillennialism also teaches that the millennium is a literal 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth, 1000 literal years & not just a long time.

That's in contrast with the POST-millennial perspective, which also may take the 1000-years Revelation 20 literally though not all postmillennialists agree on that.

The POST-millennial view teaches that Jesus will come AFTER the millennium—where post means after.

Postmillennialists believe that the Gospel will spread across the earth so thoroughly that Christians will influence the world in a way that prepares for Jesus to come again.

In that sense, postmillennialists may speak of bringing in the kingdom or of elevating in government & society to lead the world into justice.

In that sense, Jesus is either ruling now or increasing His rule over the earth until it extends into His millennial reign.

And that reign may be a literal 1000 years or it may merely indicate a long time before Jesus returns for the final judgment.

That view loses credence as the world becomes worse & as the church doesn't taken over the world.

The 3rd position found within evangelicalism & probably more popular in Reformed circles is amillennialism.

The A-millennial position is called that because the 'A' prefix indicates 'no' or 'not', meaning there will be no future millennial before Christ comes again.

It's not that they throw out Revelation 20 & say it does not happen—they merely say it is a long period of time & it is NOT in the future.

They see it as the church age between Christ's 1st & 2nd Comings when Christ is reigning in the hearts of believers.

They see Satan as restrained in what he's able to do as the Gospel reaches the nations.

But I don't think that is what Revelation 20 depicts as Satan bound & sealed up in a bottomless abyss right now.

And I find no reason in the text of Revelation 20 to discount the 6 clear uses of the phrase 1000 years with time descriptions.

Robert Thomas, one of my seminary professors who recently went to be with the Lord, noted in his Revelation commentary that numerous ways existed to describe a long period of time.

Dr. Thomas said, *“If the writer wanted a very large symbolic number, why did he not use 144,000 ([as in] 7:1ff; 14:ff), 200,000,000 (9:16), “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (5:11) or an incalculably large number (7:9)?”*

Dr. Thomas’s point is that a long period of time could’ve been described in many other ways & there’s no explanation why 1000 would be chosen as the number unless it meant 1000.

Revelation 20-22 distinguishes between the millennium and eternal new heavens & new earth as happening one after the other.

But let me clarify that that does not mean those future time periods could not be lumped together in OT prophecy.

Often OT prophecy contains elements of Jesus’ 1st Coming mixed with promises of His 2nd Coming & the same can be true of the millennium & the new heavens & new earth.

You may recall the term prophetic foreshortening as a description that’s used for that.

It’s where the prophet looks way into the future like we would look at a distant mountain range & he describes all the details he sees like we would describe mountains we see.

Yet when you get to those prophecies in detail up close, like when you get to those mountains up close, you find gaps of time like valleys in between them.

And that’s what happened with some prophecies of the millennium & the eternal state just like it happened with Jesus’ 1st & 2nd Comings.

I clarify that sense of prophetic foreshortening because it’s one reason some people want to spiritualize the 1000 years as the long 2000+ years of the church rather than a future 1000 years.

But Satan will be bound & believers be raised to reign in this time.

So it surely is a future time yet to come when believers’ bodies are raised to return to earth.

Therefore it is not a time of merely Christ reigning in heaven or in believers’ hearts on earth or anything else possible in this age.

It must be future & there is no reason for it not to be a literal 1000 years just as it is stated to be 6 times in this passage.

Why would that time designation be stated 6 times if it was symbolic?

I find no reason not to believe what is our 2nd point for today—to understand that the millennium is a future 1000 years.

You can be a Christian & disagree with me on this & you can be a member of this church & disagree with what we teach on this.

But the plainest & simplest sense of the text as we approach Revelation 20 is to understand that the millennium is (1) Jesus’ promised earthly kingdom & (2) a future 1000 years.

Now, #3, understand the millennium is the time when Satan is bound.

I know I’ve said that already & it is obvious in the text but my goal is to help state clearly what the text says.

So #3, understand that the millennium is the time when Satan is bound.

Read verse 1 again to start getting the details of that. [READ]

As John has seen before, here's another angel & we're not told anything more about this angel though some speculate that it's Michael the archangel since he has the power to grab Satan.

But all power comes from God so it's not necessarily Michael.

The angel does come down from heaven & his descent must be to earth since Satan had been cast down to earth as chapter 12 said.

This key shows the authority & ability to unlock & then relock this abyss & the chain shows a way to capture & restrain.

We're not told explicitly if the devil is embodied somehow or if the angel is embodied in a way that gives him a hand to hold a literal chain, but the descriptions go along with a literal abyss.

The abyss is a real spiritual place that we learned about before in chapter 9 at the 5th Trumpet judgment when opening it let out huge demonic locusts that terrorized the earth.

Revelation 11:7 & 17:8 also link some origin of the demonic power of the beast as coming from this bottomless pit.

In Luke 8:31, demons begged Jesus not to be sent to this abyss.

Demons were locked after they cohabited with women before the flood as Genesis 6 reports in connection with 1st Peter 3:19-20 & Jude 6.

You can review what more we discovered about it as we studied the 5th trumpet in Revelation 9.

But for now all we need to know is that an angel has the key to open it & to grab Satan & chain him bound in it & shut it & seal it over him.

It's hard to grasp what a spiritual bottomless pit looks like when we only think in the physical realm, but that's what it is.

Read verses 2-3 to see what happens. [READ]

The angel exercises his power to grasp down for Satan & fasten him with this chain to cast him into the abyss.

He closes it tightly with a seal over him so Satan could not get out.

That will be a wonderful blessing to everyone because of who Satan is and what he does.

As Revelation 12:9 did, we find Satan described in several ways here that reveal his history & his dangerous roles.

He is the dragon, the name most often used in the book of Revelation to describe him as fierce & dangerous & violent.

He is also the serpent of old, the ancient tempter in the Garden of Eden that deceived the woman Eve & plunged man into guilt & sin.

So he is a liar & the father of lies, as John 8:44 says & as his name devil, diabolos, describes him as a slanderer.

He is the chief adversary & enemy, as his name Satan means & as he opposes God & all that is good.

The text says this devil will be bound for a thousand years & will not be able to get out of the abyss to access the earth.

He will be shut & locked down in that bottomless pit with the result that he will not deceive the nations any longer.

We've seen the massive deceit he will bring in the Tribulation through the antichrist & false prophet such that the nations will follow the antichrist to their own destruction at Armageddon.

The nations will reject the obvious evidence of Christ as supreme & as pouring out wrath on earth as we've seen them admit repeatedly.

That deceiving power is at work now as the antichrist spirit mentioned in 1st John & other passages as the nations remain under Satan's rule still.

As 1st Peter 5:8 says, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone he may devour.

He may do so now disguised as an angel of light, as 2nd Corinthians 11:14 says.

Or he may directly attack & scheme against or lead astray believers or churches as 2nd Corinthians 2:11 & 12:7 & Ephesians 4:27 & 6:11 & 1st Timothy 5:15 all describe.

He may hinder ministry, as 1st Thessalonians 2:18 says, as he continues to be active against Christ & His promises & people as Revelation 12 depicted of him.

All that activity & freedom to trouble the earth surely proves that he is not bound during the time of the NT church.

All NT references depict the devil as a defeated foe, but still as an active enemy that must be resisted as James 4:7 says.

He still holds unbelievers captive & blinds their minds, as 2nd Corinthians 4:4 & 2nd Timothy 2:26 say.

So though the Gospel is going to the nations in this age, it is not because Satan has been bound in the abyss.

The Gospel progress of the church from NT times through today has not happened without satanic opposition & oppression.

And so it is yet to come in the future for Satan to be bound for the literal 1000-year reign of Christ on earth.

That is the time when Satan is bound & that will free the earth & its inhabitants of evil like no time since before the fall into sin.

Just think—as I said recently, for example—of how you drive when a police officer is behind you.

You drive as perfectly as possible & that's how it will be when Jesus is present on earth with his army of co-reigning believers from history.

But more so—just think of having no devil controlling the media & governments & economies or anything else.

The only evil left will be what's born inside the human heart of children born to believers who enter the millennium.

Think of how even unbelievers are restrained by the presence of a believer in the room or how you may act differently if your pastor or parents or other Christians can see you.

But far more than any of that, the millennium will not have the chief deceiver & tempter & enemy & liar & violent murderer probing at the minds & hearts of all people.

And I think that likely all Satan's demons will be bound with him in the abyss for this thousand years.

The verse doesn't explicitly state that, but it seems to fit the flow of cleansing the earth from all evil for Christ to reign.

But then here's a kicker—man's sinful heart will need to be tested again & proven to be evil apart from God's grace.

That's what must be meant by it being necessary for the devil to be loosed from the abyss after the thousand years.

We'll talk about that more when we cover verses 7-10.

But for now, we can know that Satan is active now but will be bound for a thousand years in the future millennium.

So we can agree with our culture's cries that the world is a dangerous place with senseless violence & terrorist threats & lack of peace & justice.

We can agree that no solution seems final or full-proof because evil is so rampant as if an invisible enemy is leading hearts to darkness.

We can agree and then share that only the power & presence of Jesus can save a soul from evil & only Jesus can restrain a soul from evil & bring justice rightly against evil.

We can praise God for the saving work of Jesus that frees us from sin's penalty & power now & that sends us forward one day into a transformed earthly kingdom with Jesus reigning.

We can live for & look toward 1000 years with Jesus on a cleansed & transformed earth.

We can know that 1000 year earthly kingdom will make this earth finally safe & peaceful & happily habitable & at home.

That will be the millennium as Jesus' promised earthly kingdom of a future 1000 years when Satan is bound.

That is a long-standing home worth waiting for & it will lead into a final home in the new heavens & new earth.

If you are not prepared as a believer to go there, please come talk with us after the service.

If you are, praise God for His promises to you & live like this earth now as the devil's domain is surely not your home.

When we have such exciting promises of freedom from death & evil & the devil ahead of us, why get bogged down in the stuff & struggles of this brief life.

Pray with me that we will live with a future, eternal perspective.