



**THE MILLENNIAL CONTROVERSY**

Episode Eighteen: Revelation 20:1-10

Few mysteries of Scripture have confounded and divided Christians like Revelation 20. Is it speaking of present reality as some contend? Or will we evolve into a period like this before Christ returns as others postulate? Or will there be a thousand-year earthly reign of Christ between Armageddon and a final battle as still others say? As we attempt to unlock this mystery, there are some critical things about which we must all agree. They are essential to our eternal destiny.

1. **Satan goes to Jail.**

*“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 was be freed for a short time.”* [Revelation 20:1-3]

* **The devil’s ultimate humiliation.** *“And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss…”* [vs. 1] In his pride, the fire angel, Lucifer thought he could fly higher than the throne of God. Now, he is about to be chained and thrown into the Abyss—not by God himself, nor by King Jesus, nor even by the archangel, Michael, but by a nameless, faceless angel. Oh, how the mighty have fallen!

*“…an angel coming down from heaven…”* [vs. 1] God sits high above where Satan cowers in defeat. This verse gives a dramatic declaration that ***the devil is not God’s opposite or equal***; and that God could have easily stopped Satan at any time since his initial rebellion. He may be a raging lion, but he has always been on God’s leash, allowed to act only because it served God’s pleasure and purpose.

Martin Luther was right: “His power is great” and he is “armed with cruel hate”, but “one little word will fell him.” James 4:7 says, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” C.S. Lewis warns that we fall into one of two traps: either we take the devil too lightly, or we have an unhealthy fear of him. Luther said that Christians ought to laugh at Satan’s bluster. A single nameless angel will throw him into the Abyss.

* **The devil’s imprisonment.** *“…seized the dragon…bound him…threw him…locked and sealed it…to keep him…”* [vv. 2&3] These are strong action verbs, one after another in rapid fire. Satan couldn’t imprison Jesus in a tomb, but a nameless angel will easily imprison him for a thousand years.

This is not a punishment, but **for restraint.** *“… to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore…”* [vs. 3] By implication, not only is the devil restrained, but so are his demons. Some wonder how any chain could restrain Satan. If God is who we affirm that he is, he can certainly make a chain strong enough. If, as Jude 6 says, demonic spirits have been chained and imprisoned for thousands of years, God can surely imprison Satan for 1,000 years. **This passage should be taken literally**:

1. The Battle of Armageddon is to be taken literally. The defeat of the Beast, Antichrist, and False Prophet must be taken literally. A literal Babylon will literally fall. The Second Coming of Jesus will literally happen. There will be a literal defeat of the ten kings and their armies. Satan is literal. So, why wouldn’t his imprisonment for a thousand years suddenly be metaphorical or symbolic?
2. This is not, as some would say, a ***curbing*** of his activities on earth, but a ***complete cessation*** of them. He is locked away, in chains, with a seal over the door of his dungeon. He will be nowhere to be seen, heard, or his presence even felt for 1,000 years. It cannot be said of him, during this Millennial period that he “roams about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he should devour.” [1 Peter 5:8] Because the whole of Scripture interprets any part of it, it stretches all credulity to say that our present age is the Millennium of Revelation 20.
3. This is not, as others say, a metaphorical way of God restraining his influence in an individual Christian’s life. This is global (the nations).
4. This is not, as still others say, only in the sense of restraining Satan from stopping Christians from fulfilling the Great Commission in this present age. This is clearly after the Great Tribulation, Wrath of God, fall of Babylon and Battle of Armageddon.
5. We know that the phrase, *“…to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore…”* could not be today. He is clearly deceiving the nations, and, most sadly, even America. People not only make falsehoods, speak falsehoods, print falsehoods, and believe falsehoods, they eat, drink, wear, act, and live them. To use a phrase coined by one author: “Satan is alive and well on planet earth.”
* **The Length of Imprisonment: A Thousand Years.** *“…and bound for a thousand years…”* [vs. 2] *“…until a thousand were ended. After that he must be set free for a short time.”* [vs. 3] Our word *millennium* comes from a combination of two Latin words: *mille* for the number 1,000 and *annum* for years—literally a thousand-year period. Historically, there have been **five theological positions** on the millennial period of Revelation 20.
1. **Historical Premillennialism.** The view held by most Early Fathers of the church, at least during the first 300 years. Premillennialists say Christ will literally return to earth before the millennium (hence the prefix ***pre***) and will reign on earth for that thousand years until releasing Satan for a short time. Most premillennialists believe that the 1,000 is a literal time period, although a few hold the number to be symbolic according to the Hebrew idea of a thousand being the complete time of his domination—which might be longer or shorter. Historical premillennialists get their name from the fact that they identify with premillennial early church fathers, including Papias, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus.
2. **Dispensational Premillennialism.** First appeared in the 19th Century (there were none in the 1800 years of Church history before this). They see the Church age as a parenthesis moment in God’s working with the Jews. During the millennium, the Old Testament prophecies of Israel’s restoration, politically and materially in the land promised to Abraham, will take place. Jerusalem will be the world capital, and people of the nations will come there to worship. There will be a virtual restoration of the Old Testament economy, temple worship, priesthood, and sacrificial system. King David will rule in restored Israel. Historical Premillennialists disagree on this, saying that Israel will return to Jesus through grace, and, as the book of Hebrews declares, the Old Testament worship has been done away with forever by the work of Christ.
3. **Amillennialism.** This view first came into the Early Church with Tyconius in 300 A.D., and then gained popularity with St. Augustine a century later. The prefix ***a*** is a Latin negation which literally means no millennium. But that is a misnomer. Amillennialism believes there is a millennium, but the number of years should not be taken literally, nor will it occur after the Great Tribulation—but before. It would be more appropriate to refer to amillennialism as ***realized eschatology.*** Amillennialism posits that we are now in the millennial period of Revelation 20. The Kingdom of God was established at the resurrection of Christ. Satan was bound insofar that he can’t stop the gospel from going to the nations. Christ’s is a spiritual, not a literal reign on earth. The Church has replaced Israel, and Old Testament passages regarding Israel are fulfilled in it today. At the end of the millennial period there will be a time of tribulation and wrath, the Battle of Armageddon, the defeat of Satan, the Great White Throne Judgment, and then the new heaven and earth of Revelation 22. Whereas premillennialism takes a grammatical, historical, and literal approach to Scripture (at least where they are clearly meant to be taken so), amillennialism tends to see many of those same Bible passages in symbolic or metaphorical terms.
4. **Postmillennialism** is somewhat like amillennialism in that it sees the millennial period of Revelation 20 commencing after the resurrection of Christ, the period of time is not to be taken literally, but Christ rules from heaven, the gospel continues to spread, our Lord becomes preeminent, and the world evolves into a period described by the Old Testament prophecies in Isaiah—world peace, no more war, the lion lying down with the lamb, etc. After this period, Christ will return. This was a popular view during the optimistic days of the late 19th Century. Two World Wars, the holocaust, and disasters of the 20th Century caused many to abandon this view. It is the least popular of the four positions, especially among evangelicals.
5. **Pan-millennialism.** Often a joke: “Everything will *pan* out in the end.” Put forth by those who can’t be bothered to study the issue, or who are afraid to offend those who hold strong opinions about one of the other four views. One might call this eschatological agnosticism. But, we believe that this kind of dismissive shrug-of-the-shoulder approach to the Second Coming Scriptures are unworthy of those who are called, like Timothy, “…to study to show yourself approved of God, a workman who doesn’t need to be ashamed…” [2 Timothy 2:15] We may disagree with each other on the millennial position we take, but we should all agree that no part of Scripture is unprofitable, and every doctrine of the Word is worthy of studying for our growth in Christ.

**In Summary:**

Your teacher, Dr. Bob Petterson, holds to a historical premillennial position. He does so after years of study, and yet with humility and respect to those who hold differing positions. He would say that this issue, while of great importance, does not cut at the heart of the fundamentals of the Faith which bind all true followers of Christ together. **Protestant Reformer, Philip Melanchthon, put it best: “In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.”**

* **Why would Christ reign on earth a thousand years when he could end it all after Armageddon and go straight to *the Final Judgment* and the *New Heaven and Earth*?** Though we can’t know for sure, beyond the simplest answer that it is for God’s pleasure and purpose, here are some plausible reasons:
1. It demonstrates Jesus’ victory and worthiness to rule a world full of still sinful people.
2. It will reveal the utter sinfulness of people. Even though they have a perfect government, a perfect Ruler, and a perfect lifestyle, when the devil is released, they will rebel yet again against heaven. Those who say that the human is inherently good, and only need a good environment to do good, will be schooled in reality.
3. During the millennial period, saints will be given the rewards of rulership promised by Jesus [Luke 19:11-27].
4. The utter depravity of Satan will again be shown, and his final fate, as well as that of his followers, vindicated. The necessity of hell will be justified.
5. Old Testament biblical promises will be fulfilled.
6. Saints Reigning for a Thousand Years. *“I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge…”* [vs. 4] Who are these who judge (or rule) in the millennial age?
* Some say the twenty-four elders who represent the church [Rev. 4:4], others suggest the apostles [Matt. 19:28], and still others speculate the saints as a whole [1 Cor. 6:2&3]

* More likely, the passage goes on to define these judges who will reign and rule with Christ: **Tribulation Martyrs**—*“…they had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and the Word of God…they had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark…They came to Christ and reigned a thousand years.”* [vs. 4]
* **The first resurrection…** [vv. 5&6] The saints who have not been raptured, but have died for their faith, will be raised to newness of life. The bodies of those who did not submit to Christ in this present life, will remain in the graves until after the millennial season. Then they will be raised to face Judgment and an eternity apart from Christ.
* **No fear of the Second Death**. *“The second death shall have no power over them.”* [vs. 6] It has often been said, “You only die once.” For those outside of Christ, there is a second and eternal death. If God is the Source of all life, to be separated from him is to experience utter, absolute death—an eternity of living, conscious death. As Jesus said, *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”* [Matt. 10:28] To fear a martyr’s death is foolish. No matter how much the pain and shame, it is but for a moment in the light of eternity, and its pain and shame small in comparison to hell.
1. **Satan’s Last Gasp.** *“And when the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and go out to deceive the nations…”* [vs. 7] After 1,000 years of Christ’s perfect reign, the nations, [Greek *ethnoi*] or peoples of the world will be again deceived by Satan. After perfection with Christ, they will opt for defeat with Satan. This is a clear demonstration of the total depravity of fallen people. Outside of Christ, we are without hope in this world.
* *“…to the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them to battle. In number, they are like the sand on the seashore…”* [vs. 8] Gog and Magog are prophetic enemies of Israel in Ezekiel 38&39. John borrows that name. Is it symbolic of all the enemies of God’s people, or specific nations? There’s lots of speculation. But it’s like arguing how many angels are dancing on the head of a pin. Suffice it to say, this is Satan’s last hurrah, and sinful humanity’s final attempt at autonomy that began in the Garden of Eden.
* *“…surrounded the camp of God’s people…”* [vs. 9] This would be Jerusalem, the capital of Christ’s millennial realm. After marching across the earth, this mega army will be destroyed in a moment: *“But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.”* [vs. 9]
* *“…and the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur…They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”* Like every great story, God gets the villain in the end. [More on hell next week]

**So, who’s side are you on? If this is how it all ends, you can *now* make sure that you are on the right side of history—along with those you love. Remember, forever is a long time!**