

“The Millennial Reign of Christ”

Rev. 20:1-10

- INTRO. - (Give title) Can you imagine a world that is completely dominated by righteousness and justice? Can you imagine a world where the curse of sin has been removed and Jesus Christ Himself is ruling the nations (along with His saints)? That may seem like a “pipe-dream” to many today, but that is exactly what the Bible declares will some day take place.
- There are literally hundreds of OT passages that predict this age of the messianic kingdom. John MacArthur says, “The millennial kingdom is called by many names in Scripture. In Matthew 19:28 Jesus calls it ‘the regeneration.’ Acts 3:19 describes the kingdom as ‘times of refreshing,’ while verse 21 of that chapter calls it ‘the period of restoration of all things.’ The apostle Paul refers to it in Ephesians 1:10 as ‘an administration suitable to the fulness of the times.’”
- The theme of the kingdom is also very prominent in the NT as well. John Bright has written, “The Bible is *one* book. Had we to give that book a title, we might with justice call it ‘The Book of the Coming Kingdom of God.’”
- It is for this reason that Rev. 20 is (perhaps) the most important chapter in the entire book of Revelation. Even though it is *not* the only place in the Bible where the millennium is taught, it is one of the most clear passages on this kingdom age. And this passage reveals some things about the millennial kingdom that are *not* revealed anywhere else in Scripture. So it is a key text.
- We read the first ten verses of ch. 20 a few minutes ago, and I had introduced the issue of the Millennium at the end of ch. 19 (just before we went to Ezek. 37-39). But this is such a critical passage, I want to read it again to get it fresh in our minds, and then we’ll come back a break it down. “And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ²And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³and threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. ⁴And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the 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 upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed 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. ⁷And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, ⁸and 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. ⁹And 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. ¹⁰And 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.”

- Now, it's been a few weeks ago, but I hope you remember we were looking at the issue of hermeneutics, and why we should take the 1,000 years of the Millennium literally. I noted that it has been widely recognized that if you take the Scripture literally, it leads to a premillennial position.
- And John MacArthur gives three primary reasons why we should interpret OT prophecies literally. He says, “First, if the literal sense of a passage is rejected, who is to determine what the nonliteral or spiritual meaning is, since the normal rules of interpretation do *not* apply?”
- He quotes Walter Kaiser at this point, who says, “Short of saying that every person's fancy is his or her own rule...there simply are no justifiable criteria for

setting boundaries once the interpreter departs from the normal usage of language.”

- MacArthur continues, “Second, adopting a nonliteral view of the OT kingdom prophecies raises some disturbing questions: What did those prophecies mean to those to whom they were addressed? If prophecies seemingly addressed to Israel really apply to the church (which did *not* exist at the time), did God give revelation that failed to reveal? And if those prophecies were meant to apply symbolically to the church, why were they addressed to Israel? What meaning could such prophecies have in their historical settings?”
- He says, “Ironically, many who spiritualize OT prophecies reject the futurist interpretation of Revelation because it allegedly robs the book of its meaning for those to whom it was written. Yet they do the very same thing with the OT kingdom prophecies.”
- “Third, spiritualizing those prophecies leads to some glaring inconsistencies. It is inconsistent to argue that the cursings they pronounce apply literally to Israel, while the blessings they promise apply symbolically and spiritually to the church.”
- He observes that “both amillennialists and postmillennialists interpret some prophetic events literally, such as Christ's second coming, the Great White Throne judgment, and the new heavens and the

new earth. Why *not* interpret the millennial kingdom literally?” (Why do they pick and choose?)

- They interpret nonprophetic passages in a literal, historical, grammatical way. Why do they change their hermeneutical approach when it comes to prophecy?
- Historically, it all comes down to the influence of Augustine. (It actually started a little earlier than Augustine, with the Alexandrian school, and most notably Origen. But there is no doubt that Augustine was the greatest influence.)
- Johnson writes, “the ancient church down to the time of Augustine (354-430)...unquestionably held to the teaching of an earthly, historical reign of peace that was to follow the defeat of Antichrist and the physical resurrection of the saints but precede both the judgment and the new creation.”
- In other words, up until Augustine the church was premillennial in its understanding of end-time events. But, (as Berkhof explains), with Augustine “the die was cast against the expectation of a [literal] millennial kingdom for centuries to come.” Amillennialism was the view of most of the Reformers, and anyone today who is in the Reformed tradition most likely holds to this view.
- By the way, I made that statement earlier, but I think I need to clarify it. When I say “the Reformed

tradition,” I am talking about the Reformed tradition in regard to eschatology. If you are a Presbyterian (for example) there is a good chance you are an amillennialist. The word “reformed” can refer to a number of different things, but I am primarily talking about the traditional reformed position on eschatology.

- And the truth of the matter is, something called “the recapitulation method of interpretation” has had a huge impact on the issue of eschatology for centuries, both in the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church. It was Augustine’s approach, and his influence is still being felt today.
- And, in addition to that, Alan Johnson explains that “during the Reformation times, still another type of interpretation developed, expounded by a Jesuit scholar named Ribeira (1537-91).”
- The main difference in *his* view was that he said, “rather than the millennium taking place upon the earth, it takes place in heaven.” And this has become the second main option for nonmillennialists today.
- Now, before we move into the text of ch. 20, I want to go back and give a few more comments about the three main millennial positions. First of all, the premillennial position.

- There are two major varieties of premillennialist: the dispensational premillennialist and the historic premillennialist.
- Steve Gregg explains that “the principal point of departure between these two groups is that the (dispensationalists) believe in a special status of the nation (of) Israel in the redemptive work of God in the end times, resulting in a restored millennial temple in Jerusalem complete with Levitical priests and animal sacrifices, whereas the historic premillennialists see the church, rather than ethnic Israel, as prominent in the millennial period.”
- He also says that “dispensationalists...are distinctive in holding that the church will be raptured out of the earth seven years prior to the commencement of the Millennium, whereas other premillennialists see the Rapture of the church as occurring simultaneously with the descent of Christ to earth at the establishment of the millennial order.”
- As far as postmillennialism, the idea is that “the world will become *christianized*, either as the result of worldwide revival and mass conversion, or through the imposition of Christian ideals by converted rulers and Christian governments.” Jonathan Edwards was one of the early proponents of this view, but in modern times it is most often held by those in the Christian Reconstructionism movement. That is sometimes called “dominion theology.”
- For the amillennialists, Rev. 20 is understood spiritually or symbolically (*not* literally). Gregg writes, “The time frame is seen to be the whole time between Christ’s first and second advents. Thus the binding of Satan at the beginning of the Millennium is associated with the First Coming of Christ, and the ‘fire from heaven’ at the end of the Millennium is associated with His Second Coming.”
- Gregg goes on to explain, “In addition to the treatment of Revelation 20, each millennial position has its own way of understanding the Old Testament prophets’ prediction of a messianic kingdom age. Virtually all of the Old Testament prophets (as well as the Psalms) anticipate a golden age of great peace and justice ruled over by the expected Messiah.”
- “Premillennial interpreters may apply these passages to the future Millennium (as the dispensationalists do), or see them fulfilled at least partially in the church as well as the Millennium (as do some historic premillennialists).”
- “*Amillennialists* generally assume all such prophecies are fulfilled during the entire age of the church, assigning *spiritual* meanings to the terminology of the prophecies.”
- “Postmillennialists may apply them either to the entire church age or specifically to the golden age at the end of the present dispensation.”

- Well, that is enough on these three views (although it is very important for us to understand them). Let's move now into the text of Rev. 20. And we're going to see three aspects of the Millennial kingdom here. First of all, we see:

I. THE BINDING OF SATAN (vv. 1-3)

- One of the main reasons why the Millennial kingdom will be such a blessed kingdom is the fact that Satan will be taken out of the world.
- Look with me at v. 1, "And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time."
- Even though this chapter has a lot to do with the Millennial kingdom (and that is what it is known for), it also has a lot to do with the final activity of Satan.
- Now that the Beast and the False Prophet are in the lake of fire, the attention turns to the one who was behind their evil reign -- the devil himself.
- Although there are *some* who have claimed that this is simply a recapitulation of the account of Satan being

cast out of heaven to the earth (as we saw in 12:9), this can't be the case because *here* he is taken away from the earth to the abyss.

- Rather than deceiving the whole world, (as it says in 12:9), he is now unable to have any evil influence in the world until the very end of the 1,000 years.
- Postmillennialists and amillennialists often want to see this "binding" as his defeat by Christ on the cross. But, as Dr. Thomas explains, "The only way one could view Satan as bound before a time in the future would be to construe his binding as a restriction of his activity, *not* a cessation of it. Confinement to the abyss, however, requires a complete termination of his activity in the sphere of the earth. To date, this has never happened. (And) the uniform testimony of the NT is that Satan is *not* bound during the period between Christ's two advents."
- As the King sets up His Kingdom, the first order of business is to remove the chief rebel. No longer will Satan be "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4) or "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2).
- And, can you imagine how this will change the world? Imagine a world with no devil to tempt anyone. There will be no devil and no demons. They will all be removed from this earth.
- Back to the very beginning of v. 1, the phrase "kai eidon" (and I saw) indicates progression in the

chronological flow. This has been the case all throughout this book, and it fits perfectly with a futuristic premillennial perspective.

- This means that the millennial kingdom will come *after* the Second Coming of Christ. And if we just take the book of Revelation in its natural chronological flow, it shows that after the seven years of Tribulation (chps. 6-18), the Lord will return (chp. 19), and then He will establish His Kingdom (chp. 20).
- And *then*, (beginning in ch. 21) we see the eternal state, with the coming of the new heavens and the new earth.
- And again, even those who do *not* hold to a premillennial view are forced to admit that if you interpret the Bible literally, you necessarily end up with premillennialism.
- MacArthur quotes Anthony Hoekema, who is an amillennialist. He says, “Let us assume, for example, that the book of Revelation is to be interpreted in an exclusively futuristic sense...Let us further assume that what is presented in Revelation 20 must necessarily follow, in chronological order, what was described in chapter 19. We are then virtually compelled to believe that the thousand-year reign depicted in 20:4 must come after the return of Christ described in 19:11.” Well, duh!
- What good reason is there for *not* taking it in its natural, logical, chronological order? There is none, unless you have a presupposition *not* to.
- MacArthur says, “The passage clearly teaches that Christ’s return precedes the millennial kingdom—a scenario incompatible with postmillennialism and amillennialism, but exactly what premillennialism teaches.”
- He says, “To get around the difficulty the chronology of Revelation poses for their views, postmillennialists and amillennialists must deny that chapter 20 follows chapter 19 chronologically.”
- Now, go back to v. 1 again, “And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.”
- Listen, it really isn’t that important to know who this angel is, but it is *possible* this could be Michael, the archangel. It appears from Scripture that he is the most powerful of all God’s holy angels, and therefore would be a logical choice here. Jude 9 calls him “the archangel.” Michael is pictured in Scripture as a great adversary of Satan.
- Some have suggested that this “angel” might be someone else, such as Christ, the Holy Spirit, the twelve apostles, one of the popes, or Constantine. None of these claims, however, has any real validity. As Walvoord writes, “The better course is to

understand him to be a special angel commissioned for this particular task.” Whether he is Michael or *not*, he is (no doubt) a mighty angel.

- The angel is pictured here as “coming down from heaven,” and the reason this is so is because Satan is now confined to the earth. So the angel has to descend from heaven to the earth in order to “lay hold” of him.
- This angel has two things in his hand – “the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain...” We’ve already seen this “key” in 9:1. *There* it says, “And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.”
- In *that* case, the angel was opening the bottomless pit to let some horrible demons *out* – in *this* case he is going to be putting some *in*.
- The “great chain” (in v. 1) doesn’t *necessarily* have to be taken literally, as long as we understand this to mean that Satan is literally bound. Being a supernatural being, it is likely that this refers to some other type of restraint that is known only to God.
- Interestingly, in Jude 6 we are told that there are certain demons that are being kept “in eternal bonds.” The KJV has “everlasting chains.” It is a different word for “chains” than is used in Rev. 20:1, but it

literally means “bands” (like bands of iron). The point is, that they are completely bound.

- The word for “abyss” there is a fairly common word in Scripture. It is used seven times here in the Revelation, and it is always a literal place. It is a temporary place of torment for demons.
- We learn from the Gospel writers that the abyss is *not* the permanent place of torment for Satan and his demons. That is the lake of fire (Matt.25:41). But it *is* a place the demons fear (Luke 8:31).
- We learn from the story of the demons that were cast into the swine that they do *not* want to go into this place because they will be tormented and contained there.
- The Apostle Peter talks about this place as the prison house of the worst demons – those who cohabited with women in Gen. 6.
- Listen to 1 Peter 3:19-20, “in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.”
- Now, that is a difficult passage, but the bottom line is that this is speaking of certain demons who attempted

to corrupt the human race by cohabiting with human women in order to create an unredeemable race.

- These demons were so wicked and vile, that Jude 6 tells us God has shut them up in the abyss and that they will never be released. They ultimately will be transferred from there to the lake of fire.
- Jude 6 describes their confinement as “eternal bonds” and they will be kept there until the day of their final judgment in the lake of fire, where they will be joined by Satan and the rest of the demons.
- Now, we don’t need to go through the four titles used for Satan (here in v. 1) because we have already seen them (in 12:9). There is no doubt who this is.
- And the reference to the 1,000 years (here) is the first of six times that this same amount of time is mentioned in this chapter (vv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). Even the constant repetition of this number is confirmation that it is literal.
- Walvoord writes, “It is the plain statement of the text six times. It is doubtful that any symbolic number, if there be such, is ever repeated that many times.”
- Now, some who want to deny that this 1,000 year period is literal, point to 2 Peter 3:8, which says, “But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and

a thousand years as one day.” (Ps. 90:4 is also pointed to)

- But, as John Walvoord points out, “‘A thousand years’ in these two verses refers to a literal thousand years. To say that the period with man is only one day with God, does *not* deny that it is actually a thousand years with God too.”
- Walvoord explains that “the point is that time does *not* limit an eternal God, *not* that He is ignorant of what time means with man.” We’ve already seen where there is nowhere in the Revelation that it is certain that a number should be taken symbolically.
- Any time John wants to convey an indefinite number, (especially in regard to a length of time), he uses a phrase like “micron chronon” (a little time). That’s the phrase he uses in 20:3 to describe how long Satan will be released at the end of the Millennium.
- But there is another problem for those who do *not* take this at face value. MacArthur writes, “Satan’s binding poses a serious difficulty for postmillennialists and amillennialists. Amillennialists argue that Satan is already ‘bound,’ since...they believe we are in the Millennium now (though they do *not* view it as one thousand literal years in length).”
- He says, “Many postmillennialists also believe that Satan is presently ‘bound,’ because otherwise it is difficult to see how the church could usher in the

Millennium. Yet the biblical description of Satan's activity in this present age makes it impossible to believe that he has already been 'bound'."

- Someone once said, "If (Satan) is bound today, the chain is too long." Steve Gregg says, "There can be no doubt that the nations still experience satanically inspired deception today, which challenges any interpretation of this vision that would make Satan to be currently bound."
- MacArthur says, "Amillennialists and postmillennialists generally argue that Satan was bound at the Cross, and that his binding simply means that he can no longer deceive the nations and keep them from learning God's truth."
- "But Satan did *not* keep the Gentile nations from the knowledge of the truth before his alleged binding at the Cross...Further...the testimony of Scripture is that Satan is anything but bound in this present age, but will be during the coming earthly kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ."
- It's only during the millennial kingdom that Satan will be confined in the abyss where he will no longer be able to "deceive the nations any longer" (v. 3).
- And you can be sure that Satan will *not* be able to get loose during this 1,000 years (until it is permitted by God). The angel will "shut" him in, "chain" him, and "seal" the entrance.

- Thomas writes, "The threefold means of incarceration—chaining, imprisonment, and sealing—is a forcible guarantee that the dragon will be helpless to deceive the nations during the thousand years."
- Now, this doesn't mean that people will be incapable of sinning during the Millennium. As we see (here in v. 3), at the end of the Millennium Satan will be released for a short time, *and* (as we are going to see later in this chapter), this will lead to *another* brief rebellion against God, as Satan deceives the nations once more.
- These "nations" are *not* the same ones that Christ has just destroyed in the Battle of Armageddon. They will be brand new nations that will emerge during the 1,000-year Millennium.
- And what an amazing thing it is, to think about the fact, that even after living in a perfect, righteous environment for a 1,000 years, that men will still choose to rebel against God under the influence of Satan. (We'll get back to that next week)
- We're out of time for this week. We've covered three verses. We'll stop here for tonight and pick it up here next time...
- PRAYER