

Approaching the End

The Millennium, the Final Defeat of Satan, and the Great White Throne Judgment

Introduction [Ron]

- The Transition from the Tribulation to the Millennium
- The Binding of Satan
- Reading of the Text (vv. 1-10)

The Thousand Years, Part 1 [Greg]

- Millennial Positions
 - Biblical interpreters **differ widely** in their understanding of the meaning of Revelation 20.
 - There are three major millennial views—amillennialism, postmillennialism, and premillennialism—and each is defined in relation to the Second Coming of Christ.
 - **Amillennialists** do not look for a literal kingdom. Rather, they interpret the thousand years “symbolically or spiritually, so that the reign of the saints depicts either the vindicated martyrs reigning from heaven in the present age, or earthly believers achieving spiritual victory over personal sin during the same period” (Gregg 459).
 - **Postmillennialists** anticipate that Christ will return after the millennial period, which his followers will usher in through successful evangelism or broad implementation of Christian social principles (459; Ladd 259-60).
 - **Premillennialists** expect Christ to return to the earth, resurrect the saints, and establish a literal kingdom, in which his followers will play an active role (260).
 - **Rationale** for Premillennialism
 - Substantial or complete binding of Satan
 - The Greek verb that describes Satan’s binding during the millennium, *deo*, is a common New Testament term used to denote various forms of restraint. In its most common use, it refers to the detaining of a person suspected or convicted of wrongdoing (e.g., Matt. 14:3; Mark 15:1; Acts 9:2; 12:6; Col. 4:3). Similarly, it is used to describe the restraining of a domesticated animal (Matt. 21:2) or a violent person (Mark 5:3-4), and the wrapping of a corpse (John 11:44; 19:40). It is also used literally in two parables, describing the bundling of weeds that are to be burned

(Matt. 13:30) and the subduing of a man by someone who has intruded into his home (Matt. 12:29; Mark 3:27).

- Figurative uses of *deo* describe persons whose relational freedoms have been restricted by marriage (Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:27); whose personal freedoms have been curtailed by disease (Luke 13:16); and whose spiritual resolve binds them to carry through with a plan (Acts 20:22). Additionally, the word is used to refer to the apostles' role in fixing earthly affairs (Matt. 16:19; 18:18) and to explain that the gospel is not hindered by its proponents' adverse circumstances (2 Tim. 2:9). Finally, angelic beings are kept from carrying out certain actions before the appropriate time (Rev. 9:14); this use may provide the closest parallel to Satan's binding in Revelation 20.
- In describing his vision, John goes to some lengths to emphasize the restrictions placed on Satan. A sequence of five verbs—*laid hold, bound, cast, shut up, and set a seal on*—all convey a sense of substantial, if not complete, restraint. “The elaborate measures taken to insure his custody are most easily understood as implying the complete cessation of his influence on earth (rather than a curbing of his activities)” (Mounce 362; see also Johnson, notes on 20:1-3).
- **Two literal, physical resurrections**
 - Verse 4 states succinctly that the martyrs and those who rejected the beast's image “came to life” (*ézesan*). Many versions (e.g., ESV, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV) render this as an entry into life. Verse 5 employs *ézesan* as well, this time indicating that “the rest of the dead” did not share the experience of the martyrs and faithful witnesses until the completion of the thousand years.
 - The event or reality implied by the first occurrence of *ézesan* is twice labeled as “the first resurrection” (vv. 5-6). Though the text does not refer to the second use of *ézesan* as “the second resurrection,” such a contrast is implied. Verses 5 and 6 provide additional details regarding those blessed to have a part in the first resurrection—namely, their immunity to the second death and their share in the thousand-year reign. The passing reference to the resurrection that follows the millennium should be regarded as parenthetical, and indeed appears as such in several versions (NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV).
 - Both occurrences of *ézesan* are here taken to refer to a bodily resurrection. Most interpreters recognize the second occurrence (v. 5a) as a physical event. There are no indications in the text that the first should be seen differently.
 - Nonetheless, many interpreters take the first resurrection to refer to something other than the bodily raising of a group of believers.

- **Challenges** for Premillennialism
 - Premillennialism is predicated on an essentially literal interpretation of the biblical text. However, applying this interpretive approach consistently means that one must take seriously all of the unfulfilled Old Testament teachings regarding Israel's glorious future. As a result, a **complex web** of prophecies has to be systematized, which is no small challenge.
 - One example of a challenge for premillennialism has to do with the segmentation of the resurrection into various events. Two resurrections are taught here in Revelation 20. If we take the rapture to have occurred before the Tribulation, then church-age saints are resurrected at that time. The resurrection of Old Testament saints has to factor in as well.
- The **Duration** of the Millennium
 - There are six references to a thousand-year kingdom in Revelation 20:2-7. However, there are **no other references** to a kingdom lasting 1,000 years elsewhere in the Scriptures.
 - Are the thousand years to be taken literally? Many interpreters would say no.
 - Obviously, much of what we find in Revelation is **symbolic**. Numbers mentioned in the book probably convey some symbolic meaning. God saw fit to include a lot of sevens, twelves and multiples of twelve, etc. But just because a number has a symbolic value does not mean that it is necessarily non-literal.
 - How do we take other **time references** in Revelation?
 - At least some of them (e.g., "one hour" [17:12]; "ten days" [2:10]) appear to be non-literal, perhaps merely conveying a sense of brevity.
 - It is somewhat more difficult to assign mere symbolism to the period of 1,260 days (11:3; 12:6), as the number is precise and is elsewhere converted into an equivalent number of months and years (e.g., 11:2; 12:14; 13:5). Personally, I am inclined to take this as a literal period of three-and-a-half years.
 - **Other portions** of the Bible refer to 1,000 years in a non-literal sense.
 - Psalm 90:4 addresses God's eternal transcendence: "For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night."
 - 2 Peter 3:8 exhorts believers to wait with expectation for the day of the Lord even though its coming may seem to be delayed. Specifically, Peter reminds his audience that "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day"—a statement that is based on Psalm 90:4 (Carson 1058).
 - In the only other use of the phrase, Ecclesiastes 6:6, the sense is that a lifespan of a thousand years would be extremely long.
 - In my judgment, the "thousand years" denote a lengthy period of divine rule and relief from satanic deception—possibly, but not necessarily, a literal millennium.

The Thousand Years, Part 2 [Ron]

[What will life be like in the Millennium?]

- Restoration
- Peace
- Utopia

The Loosing and Final Defeat of Satan [Greg]

- At the end of the Millennium Satan is released from the abyss to resume his former objective of deceiving the nations (vv. 1-3). The work of deception leads to a massive rebellion against Christ's rule, described in terms of an attempted military attack on His followers. Commentators differ in their understanding of whether this attack is physical or spiritual.
- The rebel forces come from "the four corners of the earth." The armies are reported to march over "the broad plain of the earth." This language is reminiscent of Habakkuk 1:6, which describes the Babylonians as a fierce army capable of sweeping across the earth and wreaking havoc.
- Satan's horde surrounds "the camp of the saints and the beloved city," which are probably not two distinct things, but a single entity described in two ways. "Camp" renders *parembole*, which occurs frequently in the LXX, both in reference to the Israelite community migrating towards Canaan and of military forces assembled for battle. The military aspect is probably in view here. The beloved city most naturally describes Jerusalem, but some conservative interpreters take it to refer to the millennial believing community—a metaphor that serves as an equivalent to the camp (Mounce 373; Johnson takes a similar view [notes on 20:7-10]).
- The reference to the nations gathering from afar as "Gog and Magog" invokes Ezekiel 38-39. In this prophecy an army from a land far to the north of Israel (Magog), led by a prince named Gog, launches an offensive against Israel, but is thoroughly defeated. By the time that John wrote Revelation, rabbinic usage had established "Gog and Magog" as a collective referent to the nations that opposed God, His Messiah, and His people (Johnson, notes on 20:7-10; Boring 209).
- Though the satanic horde's assault on the faithful appears to be inevitable, God intervenes with a consuming fire, stopping the rebels in their tracks. The verbiage that describes this judgment matches the account of 2 Kings 1:10-14, where Elisha calls fire down from heaven to devour those who oppose him. The readiness of nations to assemble in opposition to the saints under the devil's deceptive influence must be dealt with conclusively.
- The devil finally meets his fate, consignment to the lake of fire and sulfur. He joins the beast and the false prophet, who are cast there before the millennium (19:20). The eternal torment that they suffer is comparable to the judgment meted out on the followers of the beast (14:9-11; cf. 20:15).

The Great White Throne Judgment [Ron]

- After the Millennium, before eternity

- Exclusive of the righteous
- The end of creation
- A final trial
- Destination: the lake of fire

Conclusion [Greg]

- Finally, after spending several weeks studying the turbulent core of Revelation, we are approaching the end. The Millennium will bring widespread peace, justice, and knowledge of God. But as we saw tonight, this arrangement will not be perfect, for sin has to be dealt with in a final way. The binding and loosing of Satan illustrate this. As soon as the devil is released from his restraint, he will stir up a large-scale rebellion against God's authority. But there will be no ongoing conflict over the loyalties of humankind. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire—the same destination that the beast and the false prophet have already met.
- The chief tempter, deceiver, and accuser having been put away for all of eternity, we might be inclined to think that the business of dealing with evil is done. But that is not the case. Those who have failed to respond in faith to God's truth will be judged and found to be accomplices with Satan in his opposition to God. They will meet the same end as the devil himself: an eternity of separation from God in a place that is devoid of all that is good.
- As we stand with John on the verge of exploring the holy city, the New Jerusalem, we should be overcome with the significance of the events that lie in store for righteous and wicked alike. The reality of the lake of fire should cause us to examine our own hearts to make sure that we are genuine followers of Christ. John's testimony about the devil's deceptive influence should drive us to take seriously the role that he plays in our world today and will continue to play until he meets his final judgment. Finally, the contrast between the blessings of knowing Christ and the horror of being separated from Him forever should motivate us to share the good news of God's saving grace. In the final analysis, all of us deserve to be cast into the lake of fire; it is only by the grace of God that we can be saved.

Study Resources [Greg]

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