
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

Revelation 20:1-6: “The Millennium!”

General idea: John now sees the angel coming from heaven with the keys to the bottomless pit attached to a heavy chain. Then, he takes control of the dragon, which is Satan, and imprisons him for a thousand years in the pit that he locks up. At this, Satan can no longer influence or deceive people and/or nations until his sentence is up. Afterward, Satan will be released for a short time, and then he will be rendered powerless. John sees thrones, with people sitting on them who have the authority to judge. We will reign as priests, serving Him for a thousand years. John sees those who have been martyred come to life—those who lost their heads and lives because of their faith in and testimony for Christ. They paid the ultimate cost for faith and preaching the Word of God. These people did not compromise their faith, and they did not worship what is false or accept his mark. They stayed loyal to Christ and to Christ alone. Because of their extraordinary faith, they were given new life and allowed to be resurrected first. Death holds no power or authority over those whose faith is in Christ. Those who are His do not need to fear death, for life in Christ is eternal.

Vs. 1-6, Contexts: This passage echoes some of the themes of Genesis found in chapters one through three. Is this passage really about a Millennium or any of the three main views of the Millennium? The fact is, when you actually read the text in context, you will see there are far greater issues at stake. The rage of debate of a Millennium view is this: *Is this passage literal or figurative?* This is the crux of the debates on this passage and the founding of the three main millennial viewpoints. What are usually left out in these debates are the apocalyptic language structure and word meanings from the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, chapters 37-48. Just knowing these two books clears up much of the debate. This passage is about how we can have real peace and contentment when we are in Christ! We also have the responsibility to produce faith and to be loyal. It also describes Satan, who was unable to prevent Christ’s incarnation and redemption, thus seeks to manipulate and destroy His followers. By knowing Satan’s fate, we can have trust in Christ and hope for our future. Satan cannot influence or deceive us outside of God’s will. His reign may be limited now, but at some point in time, He is completely neutered.

Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Abyss/bottomless pit* means "very deep" (the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament word for *bottomless*). Jewish tradition saw this as a literal, subterranean place, used for the imprisonment of evil demons and Satan, who was actually on the earth. Angels were assigned to guard it and were given *keys* to it. Now, with our better understanding of science and biblical interpretation, most scholars see this as an extra dimension or residence; the exact locale we cannot fathom. John is using this vibrant imagery not necessarily to be a literal place we can go see, but rather to show that hell is real, Satan’s punishment is real, and demons are real. (Gen. 1:2;

7:11; Prov. 8:28; Luke 8:31; Rev. 9:1; 20:1).

- *Seized the dragon.* The context shows us it is Satan. Literally meaning “serpent” or “sea monster” such as the *leviathan*, it symbolizes monstrous evil and Heracles and his battle with the *hydra*. A dragon is also a description of Satan who is the archenemy of God, a terrifying and destructive beast who seeks the total devastation of God's people. Satan has been in rebellion against God since even before the fall of Man. He has been judged and will exchange his earthly throne for a bottomless pit, his finality rendering him powerless and bankrupt. This is a reference to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. It is also a description of Satan's ways and strategies to lead the whole world astray (apocryphal book “Bell and the Dragon;” Gen. 3:1-15; Job 1-2; Psalm 74:13-15; 89:9-10; Is. 27:1; 30:7; 51:9; Ezek. 29:3; Matt. 25:41; Luke 10:18; 11:14-23; John 12:31; Col. 2:15; Rev. 12:3, 7-9; 13:2; 19:20; 20:2).
- *Bound him* refers to one's power being suppressed or muted. Satan's power and influence are constrained by God's will and are under His judgment. The theme of imprisoned demons is seen in 1 Enoch and Tobit where they are evil and waiting trial before God. (Is. 24:21-22; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 27:62-66; 1 Cor. 6:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:21).
- *Reigned with Christ.* Most people seem to read in what they think this should say and not what it actually says. Basically, it means we have peace and responsibility when we are in Christ (Matt. 10:33; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12)!
- *Thousand years.* A thousand years, or “ten one hundreds,” was a common Jewish and Greek metaphor for an age of peace. Plato used it too. Jewish usage of time is not usually literal; rather, it means ages or periods such as in Genesis 1. The word is *Yom*, and means a *time period*, not necessarily a literal day. Many *futurists* see this as the beginning of a new era, dispensation, or church age called the “millennium,” filled with prosperity and peace. This may be so, but this is not what the text is saying. It is saying that we have peace when we are in Christ! Some saw this as an intermediate state between death and the afterlife of heaven or hell. Also, in Jewish thinking, this was the *messianic period* or “travail,” from which comes the Amillennial view, as in the age of Christ or Christianity until He returns. The Catholics picked up on this for their theory of purgatory. Purgatory is not a biblical representation, but rather a Jewish cultural view, from which John draws his language to show us the main point of trusting in Christ, He is our “All in All” in and for all situations, that Paul explains in Romans 8 (Psalm 90:4; Is. 65:20; 1 Thess. 2:18; 1 Pet. 5:8).
- *Deceiving the nations.* Refers to deception and false prophets that allure people away from logic, clear thinking, relying on God, and trusting in His Truth (Deut. 13:1-3; Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev 13:14; 16:14; 19:20)
- *Souls.* Refers to those who have been martyred because they remained faithful to Christ or that these people are the most noble and worthy to receive reward. This does not mean other faithful Christians and saints are excluded or there is a second class or a second resurrection for the others. It also signifies suffering, being

wronged, and persecution, but the application is that they remained true to the faith, regardless of circumstances. In context, this image indicates that the martyrs are like sacrifices, just as Christ was when he represented the Passover Lamb, innocent and undeserving, whose blood was shed. In Christ's case, it was for our redemption; in the martyr's case, it was seemingly in vain, but in reality, it glorified God (Phil. 2:6-11; Rev. 6: 9-10).

- *Beheaded.* Rome would behead with a big ax its citizens who were deemed as criminals, as it was considered quick and painless as compared to being crucified. Of course, they were usually beaten first as Paul was on many occasions.
- *Rest of the dead.* May refer to those who are “spiritually dead,” or the wicked, and not necessarily dead bodies.
- *The first resurrection.* This perhaps refers to our “rapture” to meet Christ, meaning we are taken bodily to meet Him when He returns. The various theories of the rapture and end-times usually are not based on Scripture. “Rapture,” which is not even a biblical word, comes from the Latin to “meet in the air,” and simply means (from Biblical exegesis) to meet with Christ. It is not necessarily even up in the air, as that is a metaphor to meet as two warring parties would in the middle of a battlefield to discuss terms. The context and language suggests two resurrections, but this may refer more to a contrast between our bodily death and the second death, which is spiritual and eternal. Our physical is temporary; our soul is primarily more important. The theme of resurrection is our hope for today, because we are with and in Christ, our “being” is made for eternity. What matters most to God is our trust and faithfulness in Him, for which we are rewarded. This is more fully explored by Paul in Philipians, chapter 3 (Is. 65:20; Dan. 7:14-18; Amos 5:18; Matt. 19:28-30; 25:14-30; John 5:24-29; 1 Cor. 15:51-57; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-3; Rev. 6:9-10).
- *Second death.* Refers to Hell and eternal damnation that as Christians we do not need to fear.
- *Priests.* In the Old Testament, this meant that all God's people were holy to Him. Under law, there were specific roles in the priesthood that people were called and ordained to fill. Priests were to be bridges from God to man. Now, through Christ, we have direct, intimate access to Him, and in the future, each of us will reign with Him. Each of us is a *royal priest* as a representative of Christ (doctrine of the *priesthood of all believers*) on earth, and as ministers, we model His character and thus have no need for a Temple. God's Kingdom is now; those who say the Temple must be reconstructed before Christ returns do not get this vital point (Ex. 19:1-6; 20:6; Lev. 10:10-11; Isa. 66:20; Matt. 21:43; 28:19-20; Rom. 15:16; 2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 2:1-10; Heb. 7; 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:1-10; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:9-10; 20:4-6).
- *Reign with him.* This means the reign of the faithful—God's people—and our responsibility as we serve for and with Him

Thoughts and Applications:

This passage plainly tells us that we have abundant peace and serenity when we are in Christ, because He is our All in All! Keep in mind the context, especially chapter 19. This also seems to make reference to faithfulness as the most supreme honor we can give our Lord. Christ insists on our active faith, commitment, and loyalty fueled in our passionate devotion to Him for which there is abundant reward! Revelation is not about doom and gloom, or about how things will take place in sequence and order; rather, it is about our jubilation in Christ and our call to remain faithful no matter what! This passage's intent was also to be a great comfort to the persecuted Christians, who learned that Satan is limited and will not triumph over them when Christ is ruling their hearts and minds.

The spread of the Gospel and the growth of faith are principal over any view or theory we may have in our church, denomination, or hold personally. God is much more concerned with our spiritual formation than with our vain speculations of end-times theories. Just read what He says to us in 1 Timothy chapter 1! What does God want us to do? Spend our energies in conjecture and argumentation or grow our faith and spread His Word!? To make statements that someone is less spiritual for not believing in another's view is the heresy that Scripture warns us of, and misses the point that Christ has for us to honor Him, trust Him, and work to build and further His kingdom!

The Three Prevailing Millennium Views Chapter twenty is about the three main views of the Millennium: Post-millennium/Postmillennial, Pre-millennium/Premillennial, and Am-millennium/Amillennial (see background article) that intersect into the four views. Chapters twenty-one and twenty-two deal with the literal versus the non-literal interpretation of Scripture. Each of the four views takes various positions within each of these millennia views.

This passage starts the millennial viewpoints. Most theologians in Church history from the early church fathers such as Augustine, and including the Reformers Calvin and Luther, saw this passage as metaphoric; "Amillennial" as in not a literal but symbolic interpretation. This is mainly because it is what the texts stated by the usage of the Jewish metaphoric words and *genre*. There have been some that have seen a future "premillennial" viewpoint such as Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and most famous, Isaac Newton (there debate is whether this happens before or after Christ's return; most see after). But, these people were not well schooled in biblical languages or well read in this subject. There is another group who are versed in biblical languages and well educated that takes a "postmillennial" view and include Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, and Charles Finney (he was not well educated, not that education is that important, but gives one more tools to examine and more information to see what God has to say) that a millennial Kingdom would precede Jesus' second coming. Hence, there was a lot of controversy in the mid-twentieth century when most people who wrote on this subject no longer looked to *genres*, historical background, original languages, or were just biblically illiterate, so all kinds of theories exist through to today. One example

is not realizing that so much of this is dependent on the Old Testament metaphors used in places such as in Jeremiah. The main problem is that Christians divide over this, regarding their position as the solely correct and imminent one when Christ Himself told us in Matthew 24 what will happen and not to theorize or fret over it, just be prepared. That means to grow in faith in Him, not spend our energies in argumentation. Ironically, people who engage in vicious debate and fight over this only serve Satan and not Christ!

The word millennium is a combination of two Latin words, *mille*, meaning a "thousand," and *annus*, meaning a "year". The debate is over if this is to be taken literally as 1,000 definite years, or interpreted metaphorically (as the language suggests), meaning a long, indeterminate period of time. There are three main popular views to this subject:

- *Amillennialism*: This millennium portrays the present reign of Christ, God's kingdom, which will be followed by Christ's second coming. The souls of the departed are with Christ in heaven. Most in this camp believe that after Christ's final judgment, the new earth will be formed—His eternal, perfect kingdom. This is the most popular view from the Early Church Fathers, the Reformers, and most denominations today. They believe that Christ through His work, death, and resurrection defeated Satan and he is restricted, and bound in power and scope to allow the spread of the Gospel and the building of the Church. This view sees us now in the millennium. Many sensationalists today say this view is heresy, but it is not; it is within the scope of biblical theology as clearly defined by Scripture. Such sensationalists rarely read the Bible for what it says or in its context! This is also not an essential matter (Matt. 12:9; John 12:31; Col. 2:15; Rev. 17:8; 19:9)!
- *Premillennialism*: We are living in a partial aspect of God's kingdom which in time will become the great climax of Christ's return when He will start His Kingdom full on, which says that the Second Coming of our Lord will take place before the millennium. Then, Jesus will literally reign on earth for a thousand years that will merge into the eternal kingdom, in an age of peace and righteousness on a new earth.
- *Postmillennialism*: This world will eventually all or mostly be converted to Christianity; then and only then will the millennium of a new earth filled with peace and prosperity begin. This view has Christ returning after the millennium, and we Christians in charge; it is up to us to engage this before His second coming. Then, Christ presides over the final judgment and eternity.

Just like the four views, Preterist, Futurist, Idealist and Historicist, all these views are also mostly read into the text. There is truth and error in each one, since Scripture does not teach any of them fully (see background article for more information).

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Are you a person who likes to take control of a situation or a project? What does it mean to have peace when we are in Christ?
2. What do you think life would look like in an age of peace or a in a Millennium when we will reign as priests, serving Him for a thousand (indeterminate amount) years?
3. Satan was unable to prevent Christ's incarnation and redemption, thus he seeks to manipulate and destroy His followers, meaning you! So, what are you going to do about it? How can you take control of Satan in your life?
4. What does this passage say to you? Is it literal or figurative? Does it matter? Why do so many interpreters of this passage seem to miss the main point? What is the main point for you?
5. God, through this angel, takes control of the dragon who is Satan. How does it make you feel that God is in charge over Satan? How do you trust God when it does not seem that He has taken control? (Some Bible commentators see that God has not taken control of Satan yet.)
6. Satan is limited in how he can influence or deceive people, and in some point in time He will be neutered. How does that raise your confidence in facing the challenges of life?
7. Why do you suppose that God allows Satan to be released for a short time? How do you think people who like evil will react when he is rendered powerless?
8. How do you feel when you hear of a Christian who has lost his or her life because of his or her faith and testimony in Christ?

9. What price are you willing to pay for your faith and preaching the Word of God? What causes your fears, and your not being willing to pay a price or an ultimate price?
10. What does it mean to you that death holds no power or authority over those whose faith is in Christ? Why would a Christian fear death then? What does it mean to your faith that your life in Christ is eternal?
11. What does it take for you to stay loyal to Christ and to Christ alone? What gets in the way of your loyalty? What can you do to be more loyal to Him?
12. When we are in Christ, we have abundant peace and serenity because He is our All in All. How is this so in you? Can this be more so in you and your church?

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