

## Revelation Bible Study #47

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Revelation 20:1-6

**1** Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. **2** And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, **3** and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

**4** Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. **5** The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. **6** Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

### **Introduction**

We now arrive at the most controversial passage in all the Book of Revelation, from which countless debates have arisen. The topic of discussion, the Millennium, is not so much the *cause* of the debate. The arguments arise from this passage's nature as a kind of Rorschach test by which the reader's hermeneutics and priorities are revealed. What someone says about this “thousand years” demonstrates how they have been interpreting the rest of Revelation.

The cardinal viewpoints on the Millennium are thus:

- Pre-millennialism: Christ shall return to earth for the purposes of setting up an earthly, world spanning, thousand year kingdom and then He will enact Judgment Day. The Millennium has not occurred yet.
- Amillennialism: The Millennium is symbolic shorthand for the Church Era, spanning the time between Pentecost and the Second Advent. When Christ returns, it shall be for Judgment Day.
- Post-millennialism: The Millennium is the Church (or God acting through the Church) enacting a world-spanning golden age (of uncertain length) wherein most people are Christians. Then Christ returns for Judgment Day.

There are two more positions which have arisen in the past two centuries as well:

- “non-millennialism.” the position of most full preterists, wherein the millennium lasted between Christ's Resurrection and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. This position is also known as “the forty year millennium.”
- Dispensational Premillennialism: Christ shall return to earth for the purposes of setting up an earthly, world spanning, thousand year kingdom and then He will enact Judgment Day. During this Millennium, the world will live under a renewed dispensation of Temple worship and Torah observance, effectively making the entire world live under Old Covenant precepts and Jewish observance (since God will give Jewish people authority over all humanity).

Careful examination of the text and its juxtaposition with the rest of Revelation ultimately vindicates the Amillennialist position as the only doctrinally sound interpretation of this passage. This is especially true when considering the other texts in Scripture which address eschatology. The bulk of this lesson will be oriented toward demonstrating this fact. However, briefly the other positions may be refuted thus:<sup>1</sup>

- Pre-millennialism and dispensational pre-millennialism both insist on a physical thousand years as the only valid interpretation of this text, despite St. John speaking with symbolic language throughout Revelation as a whole. This is an inconsistent hermeneutic and thus invalid. In addition to this, the dispensational position denies the complete abrogation of the Old Covenant as discussed in Hebrews, as doing so is the only way he can hold to a Jewish-dominated millennium.
- Post-millennialism denies St. John's message that the Millennium is inaugurated by Christ and His angels, positing instead that the Church's efforts do this. The frustration of all Church efforts throughout history, the two thousand years of failure to enact such a golden age as the Post-millennialist promises, also constitutes empiric evidence that their position is unlikely.
- Non-millennialism claims that the Church was in this Millennial state for forty years, in which the saints did not co-rule with Christ in any capacity. The nature of these four decades denies any sort of empowerment for Christians or binding of the devil, making it flatly contradictory to the text as St. John writes it.

### Vs.1-3

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

The phrase “then I saw” means that the previous capitulation of this vision has restarted; we have seen a vision of Christ's Return, now it is time to “rewind the clock” so to speak and talk about the timeline leading up to the Parousia. The angel who holds the key to the pit is Abaddon, who was given the key to the abyss during the cycle of trumpets.<sup>2</sup> When he opens the pit up the first time, he calls forth an army of spiritual “locusts” who frustrate the operations of unbelieving mankind. The reader must decide if the abyss is opened a *second* time, or whether this is St. John describing the same event. If Abaddon releases the army of spiritual locusts at the same time as he binds the devil, then this would tell us that the devil's binding prevents him from preventing the activity of the locusts, who are present to scourge men and push them toward repentance.

Of note here, the dragon is identified as satan, the devil *and* the “ancient serpent.” The word “devil” is a translation of *diabolos*, which means “slanderer,”<sup>3</sup> while the word “satan” means “adversary” or “accuser.”<sup>4</sup> There is only one ancient serpent who is shown slandering, namely the serpent in the Garden of Eden who slandered God in order to deceive Eve.<sup>5</sup> The title is given to him based on his being dubbed the “father of lies” by our Lord in St. John's Gospel.<sup>6</sup> For Abaddon to bind him is to take away his ability to deceive the races of man, by which he previously ruled them; Christ

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1 Of course, entire books could be written refuting these positions, but for brevity's sake this shall suffice. We ought to focus on what is *true* more than what is false for the purpose of this study.

2 Revelation 9:1-11

3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1228.htm>

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4567.htm>

5 Genesis 3:1-7

6 John 8:44

comments that the devil, called “the ruler of this world,” is cast away by the work of the Atonement.<sup>7</sup>

It is no coincidence that Gentiles began to truly worship the real God only after the Atonement. Though there was a Jewish diaspora throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, and though they were known for occasional proselytizing, it was only after Christ spoke the Great Commission and later told the Apostles “you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”<sup>8</sup> that true conversions began en masse. Since “the ruler of this world” was bound from the Atonement onward, and that binding is portrayed here in relation to his deceptive ways, the Millennium may safely be identified as a symbolic period of time spanning the whole of the Church era before Christ's Return.

We must remember St. John's pivot to the *already-but-not-yet* dynamic. The Christian can say that the devil is already defeated, in that the devil can no longer use deception to prevent people from converting. However, his binding shows a *not yet*, because his defeat is not final until Judgment Day. The release of Satan, by which men may be deceived for a while, is done for the sake of judging him in a worse fashion than he is currently undergoing; this is to say, he must be let out of the bottomless pit before he is thrown into the lake of fire.

#### **Vs.4**

4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

There are twenty-four thrones inhabited by normal men in Heaven, sat upon by the twenty-four elders.<sup>9</sup> Being the twelve patriarchs of Israel and the twelve Apostles, these indeed were given authority to judge. The patriarchs received authority to judge their descendants, passed down from tribal head to tribal head; the Apostles received the office of the keys.<sup>10</sup> This dynamic of judgment continues for the martyrs and whosoever does not reject the Gospel. In other words, the “already” dynamic is demonstrated by the saints co-ruling with our Lord via the universal priesthood. The “not yet” is for those awaiting their time to go to Heaven.

The phrase “they came to life” is an editorial translation of a single word, ἐζήσαν.<sup>1112</sup> The literal translation is “they lived,” although the translators took note of the aorist tense in order to see a sort of resurrection dynamic. The clause is better rendered in the less restrictive “They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” This is a superior reading of the text on account of the Apostles having received the office of judgment *during their lifetimes*, and the instructions given to leaders of the Church in 1 Timothy, 1 Peter, and more; whether someone is alive here on earth or alive in the Throne Room of Heaven, they are co-reigning with Christ. This especially counts regarding ruling the Church with Him.

#### **Vs.5-6**

5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

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7 John 12:31, 16:11

8 Acts 1:8

9 Revelation 4:4

10 John 20:19-22

11 Transliterated “ezesan,” Strong's #2198

12 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2198.htm>

The “rest of the dead” are those who are not saved. St. John brings them up in distinction with *this* group, which enjoys the first resurrection. A believer sheds his mortal coil and goes off into the Throne Room to enjoy Paradise with his fellow Christians; a nonbeliever goes into hades (or Sheol).

Whoever belongs to Jesus already has the first resurrection, for Christ calls Himself the Resurrection.<sup>13</sup> They have already died in their Baptism,<sup>14</sup> and thus the death of their body does no harm to them and nor does it render them truly *dead*. For nonbelievers, the second resurrection is harmful, taking them out of the torpor of hades and bringing them back for the sake of judgment.<sup>15</sup> The co-rulership with Christ that believers enjoy *now*, both in Heaven and on earth, prefigures their reign with Him in the New Heavens and New Earth; the torments and confusion of nonbelievers, both here and in hades, prefigures their ultimate destination of torment and confusion in the lake of fire. “Already but not yet” dynamics impact both groups.

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13 John 11:25

14 Romans 6:1-4

15 John 5:29