

## *Revelation Chapter 20*

# *The Millennium and the Great White Throne*

### *Introduction to the 'Millennium'*

“They will reign with him for a thousand years” (verse 6) – this thousand year period is known as the ‘Millennium’.

There are many ways of understanding the Millennium. While the early church almost universally believed in the literal reign of Jesus initiated by his return, sadly throughout most of history the church has often denied the literal millennial reign of Christ.

- In the fourth century Tyconius was the first to champion a spiritualized interpretation, teaching that the Millennium is present ‘here and now’ (*a-millennialism*) and should be understood as only the ‘spiritual’ reign of Jesus, rather than his literal reign. His view was adopted by Saint Augustine, then the Roman Catholic Church, and then most Reformation theologians.
- Growing out of a-millennialism is the doctrine of *post-millennialism*, which teaches that the Millennium will happen in *this* age, before Jesus’ return, and that the church will bring it to pass.
- But the clear teaching of the Bible is not a-millennialism or post-millennialism, but *pre-millennialism* – Jesus will physically return *before* the Millennium, and he will personally establish and govern the millennial earth...

### *The Thousand Years and the defeat of Satan (v 1 to 10)*

“So that he might not deceive the nations any longer” (verse 4) – this shows us Satan’s main mode of attack: Satan is a deceiver, and so the **most** potent defence and weapon against Satan is the truth of God’s word.

- What do you think is the *purpose* of the Millennium?
- Why 1,000 years? Why not 100 years, or why not eternity?
- How does the Millennium end (verses 3, 5 to 10)? Why do you think it ends in this way?

“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed” (verse 4) – who sits on these thrones? The twenty-four elders representing the church (Revelation 4 v 4)? Or the apostles (Matthew 19 v 28)? Or the company of ‘saints’ as a whole (1 Corinthians 6 v 2, 3)? Perhaps this is about ‘judging angels’, but it is more likely that this refers to the saints reigning over the earth with Christ (verses 4, 6).

The “first resurrection” (verses 5, 6) is the granting of physical resurrection life to all who are dead in Christ:

- (i) it is a resurrection of blessing (“blessed and holy is the one who...”)
- (ii) it is a resurrection of power (“over such the second death has no power”)
- (iii) it is a resurrection of priesthood and privilege (“they will be priests of God... and will reign for a thousand years”).

**[MORE OVER...]**

By contrast, “the rest of the dead” (verse 5), those who are not part of the first resurrection, are not blessed; they are under the power of the second death (see verse 14); and they are without privilege. In John 5 v 28, 29 Jesus describes these two resurrections: “an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment”. The two events are separated by this 1,000 year period, because the rest of the dead do not come to life until the end of the Millennium (verse 5).

### ***Some general notes about The Millennium***

Most of what we know about the Millennium comes not from Revelation 20, but from several Old Testament passages. Life on earth during the millennial rule of Christ is illustrated in Isaiah 2 v 2 to 5, Isaiah 11 v 1 to 9, Ezekiel 37 v 24 to 28, and various passages in Isaiah chapters 60 to 66 (especially Isaiah 65 v 20 to 25); and the millennial temple is described in great detail in Ezekiel 40 to 48.

A key ‘prophecy’ is found in Gabriel’s announcement to Mary in Luke 1 v 30 to 33: “And the Lord God will give to [Jesus] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever...”

The Millennium is important, because

- (i) it will demonstrate Jesus’ victory and worthiness to rule the nations
- (ii) it will reveal the depths of man’s rebellious nature in a perfect environment (see Jeremiah 17 v 9)
- (iii) it will display the eternal depravity of Satan, who resumes his evil career as soon as he is released from prison (verses 7, 8)
- (iv) it will show the invulnerability of the “beloved city” (verse 9) and God’s new righteous order.

### ***Judgment before the Great White Throne (v 11 to 15)***

- Who is to be the Judge? Why do you think the people (both great and small) are “standing” (verse 12)?
- On what basis will each person’s final destiny be determined (verses 12, 13)? What are the only alternatives?

There are three future judgments in Scripture:

- (i) the βῆμα (*bema*) ‘judgment seat of Christ’, where Christ-followers (after the ‘*harpazo*’ or rapture) are rewarded for their faithfulness (2 Corinthians 5 v 10)
- (ii) the ‘sheep and goats’ judgment of the nations, after the Great Tribulation and Armageddon, but before Jesus establishes the millennial kingdom on earth (Matthew 25 v 31, 32)
- (iii) this judgment of the “Great White Throne”, at the end of the Millennium, where individuals whose names are not written in the “book of life” (verse 15) are thrown into the lake of fire.

For a greater understanding of the concept of the ‘book of life’ refer to Daniel 12 v 1 to 3, Philippians 4 v 3, Revelation 3 v 5, Revelation 13 v 8 and Revelation 21 v 27.

***As Christ-followers we only ‘escape’ this final judgment because of our trust in Jesus – who was judged, and who died, on our behalf (see 1 Peter 3 v 18)...***