

Introduction to Revelation
Session V – The Millennium (Rev 20)
June-July 2012

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‘Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 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. 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. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. 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. And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.’ (Revelation 20:1-10)

The question of the ‘millennium’ or thousand years have been hotly debated, and in some ways what you think about the millennium will shape how you interpret the whole book. I propose we look at the subject under four headings:

- **Who** reigns during the thousand years?
- **When** do they reign and for how long?
- **Where** do they reign?
- **Why** do they reign?

Who?

Satan is bound for a thousand years, and people sit on thrones, reigning with Christ. I would propose that these people are the figures that we saw in chapters 4-5 and new martyrs who have died during the church age.

The only times in the book of Revelation where ‘thrones’ are mentioned in the plural are in relation to the elders in Rev 4. Otherwise it’s the throne (singular) of God, or the throne of the Devil. Added to this group are those who had been beheaded for the gospel (v4). I think this is a picture of *all believers*, and the heavenly representatives, including those who have been martyred during the church age, waiting for the moment when God will put all things to rights, and hold their oppressors to account for their actions.

When?

When does this thousand year period take place?

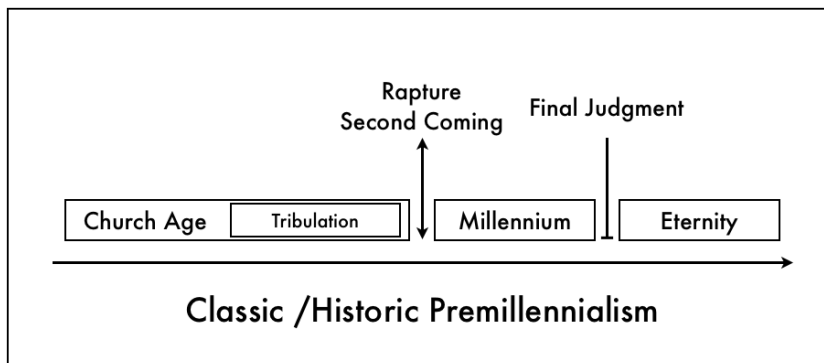
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| Exercise: In groups, put the following events in order. The Ascension of Jesus, The Rapture, The Tribulation, Final Judgment, The Second Coming, The Church Age, The Eternal State, The Millennium |
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Here are some of the major approaches to understanding this sequence of events. They are typically named according to where Christ returns in the order of events.

Premillennialism

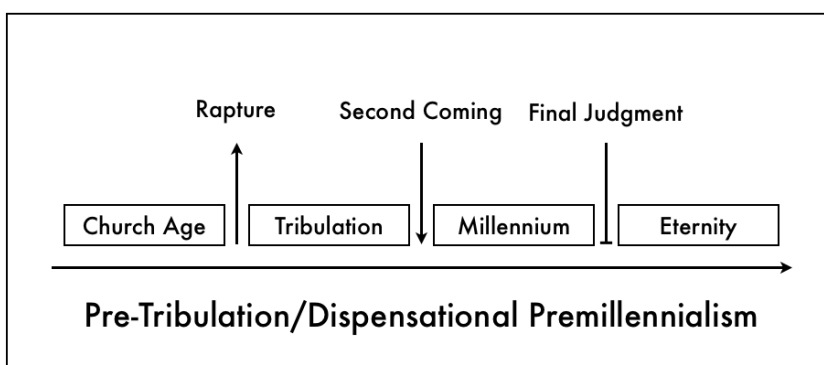
In this view, Jesus returns before the millennium. There are various versions of this sequence. The first is called Classic/Historic Premillennialism.



This view sees the tribulation as being a difficult time towards the end of the church age, before Jesus returns and establishes his rule on the earth for 1,000 years (literal or figurative). This will be a golden age for the church, many people coming to Christ during that period. Satan will be cast into the pit during the millennium and then at the end of that time there will be a final judgment.

This view does have the benefit of being a more or less straightforward reading of Revelation 20, but I think there are still a number of problems with it. It's not entirely clear what the purpose would be of having Christ back on the earth, ruling over a pure people with resurrection bodies, at the same time as unbelievers still dwell on the earth.

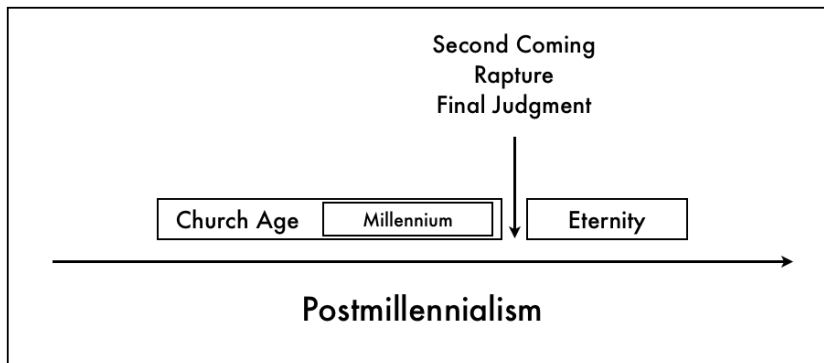
A second form of premillennialism is known as Pre-Tribulation Premillennialism, or Dispensational Premillennialism.



This is the kind of view on which the *Left Behind* books are based. Jesus will take all believers out of the earth to escape the tribulation, which is a period that will last for 7 years and at the end of which he will return to establish his 1,000 year reign on earth. At the end of the millennium, there will be a final judgment, leading into eternity.

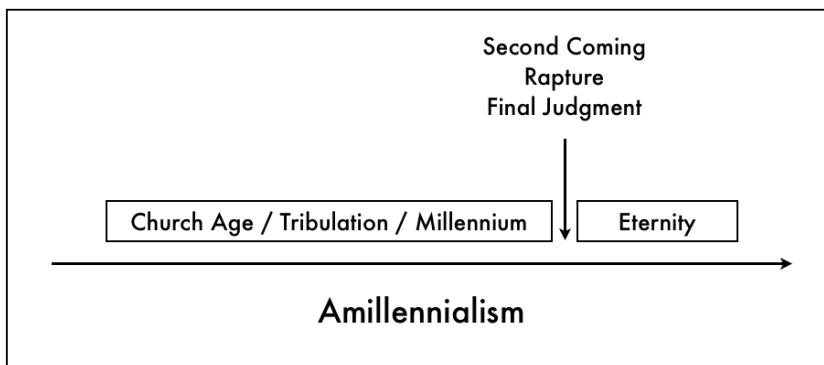
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Postmillennialism



This view sees the return of Christ coming after the millennium. This is an optimistic view, which sees the progress of the gospel increasing to the point where there is then a golden era, or millennium, in which the church has significant influence.

Amillennialism



In this view the tribulation happens during the church age, and the millennium recapitulates the church age from a different perspective. If you compare chapters 12 and 20, there seem to be some significant parallels, which indicate that John is covering the same time period again:

| Revelation 12:7-11 | Revelation 20:1-6 |
|---|---|
| Heavenly scene (v7) | Heavenly scene (v1) |
| Angelic battle against Satan (v7-8) | Angelic battle against Satan (v2) |
| Satan cast to earth (v9) | Satan cast into the abyss (v3) |
| “The great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called the devil and Satan, the one deceiving the whole inhabited earth” (v9) | “The dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan” is restrained from “deceiving the nations any longer” (v2-3) and is later loosed to deceive the nations (v3, 7-8) |
| Satan knows his time is short (v12) | Satan released for a short time after imprisonment (v3) |
| Satan’s fall results in the kingdom of Christ and his saints (v10-11) | Satan’s fall results in the kingdom of Christ and his saints (v4) |
| The Saints’ kingship is based on their faithfulness even to death and their holding to “the word of their testimony” (v11) | The Saints’ kingship is based on their faithfulness even to death and their holding to “the testimony of Jesus and the word of God” (v4) |

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Where?

I think this is talking, not about a rule on the earth, but in heaven. 42 of the 46 uses of the word 'throne' refer to thrones in heaven. The other three refer to the throne of the beast or the devil, which again seems to be located spiritually. Similarly, this picture probably draws on Daniel 7:9-13, where the thrones are also located in heaven.

Why?

Verse 1 takes us back to the ascension of Jesus. The angel has in his hand the key to the abyss, which is probably the same as the key to death and Hades, which Christ holds in chapter 1:18 following his resurrection (see also chs 1, 3, 6, 9).

The angel binds the devil for a thousand years and throws him into the pit. As we saw last week, the Devil now has no place in heaven; he's been cast down. Matt 12:29 Mark 3:27; Luke 10:17-19; John 12:31-33; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14 speak about him being bound, weakened and disarmed by Jesus' death and resurrection.

'The abyss' is probably the same as 'death and hades' and refers less to a geographical location and more to a spiritual reality. Just as heaven isn't 'up there' neither is the abyss 'down there'. As Heaven is a spiritual reality that exists alongside events on earth, so is the abyss, and in fact John can write about the region of 'death and hades' riding throughout the earth (Rev 6:8). So it's a dynamic picture and is meant to contrast Satan's previous status in heaven with his current status, in a fallen, restricted spiritual sphere of reality. (See too 2 Thessalonians 2)

'And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.' (Rev 20:7-15)

At the end of the millennium, Satan is released to gather all the nations of the world together for a final assault on the people of God. Gog and Magog are spoken about in Ezekiel 38-39 and are oppressors of Israel, who surround them, but are destroyed by fire.

The Devil and the beast and prophet are thrown into a pit, in which they are punished, and then comes the final judgment, where we see a picture of a throne. This time it's described as being white, symbolising purity and holiness. God is just and worthy to judge, and his judgment is right and good.

Reading for next week: Revelation 21-22