

THE MILLENNIUM IS NOT SYMBOLIC

SINCE THERE IS SO MUCH CONFUSION about the book of Revelation, it might be a good idea to take a moment and discuss it. This might be helpful for those who are sitting on the fence, unsure of where they stand.

There are four major interpretations of the book of Revelation. In my opinion two of these views can be dismissed immediately, which leaves just two interpretations to examine. The four views are:

Preterism: This view teaches that the whole book of Revelation was fulfilled in 70 AD, including the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. That's right: this view teaches that *Jesus Christ has already returned*. This view is utter nonsense and doesn't deserve to be taken seriously. In order for it to be true the book of Revelation must have been written before 70 AD, but it has been proven beyond any doubt that the book was written in the early 90s AD. This view has other serious problems as well, which I have discussed in my book *Even So, Come, Lord Jesus*.

Historical: This view says that the book of Revelation is an overview of all of history from the time of Christ to the

Second Coming. The problem is that this interpretation just doesn't work: people's attempts to tie the events in Revelation to real events have failed. It is a nice theory but in practice it does not work.

Amillennial: This view says that the book of Revelation is a symbolic look at the struggles between good and evil in the Church Age. It is called “amillennialism” because it teaches that there will be no literal thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth. Instead, the “millennium” is symbolic of the Church Age that we are living in now.

Premillennial: This view says that the book of Revelation is a description of what happens during the 7-year Tribulation, and is a literal reciting of events that uses symbolic language. This is the view that believes in the Tribulation, the Antichrist, the Mark of the Beast, and so forth. This view believes that at the end of the Tribulation the Lord Jesus Christ will return to Earth in person, set up a physical kingdom, and reign from Jerusalem as a king for a thousand years (a period referred to as the “millennium”).

Of these four views, two of them can be immediately dismissed. Preterism is easy to disprove and is actually silly. Christ has *not* already returned! Likewise, the historical view sounds great in theory but in practice it utterly fails. People simply can't tie the events in Revelation to real historical events. That system of interpretation just does not work.

So, between the two possibilities of amillennialism and premillennialism, how do you know which one is right? Is Revelation simply a highly symbolic look at the struggle between good and evil, or is Revelation intended to be interpreted largely literally? Is the millennium symbolic of the age we're living in

now, or is it a real thousand-year period to come?

It's a tough question, but it's not an impossible one. This passage contains the answer:

Revelation 20:1: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

In this scene an angel comes down from Heaven, binds Satan with a chain, and imprisons him in a pit so that he can no longer deceive the nations or cause any harm. The devil is then

bound for a thousand years. During that time the people who were martyred for their faith in Jesus are raised from the dead and reign with Christ for a thousand year period that is referred to as “the millennium”. Now, premillennialism teaches that this should be taken literally, while amillennialism teaches that it should be taken symbolically. So which is correct?

Well, the amillennial view claims that this thousand-year period is symbolic of the age we are living in now. They teach that when Christ died on the cross, He bound Satan and rendered him powerless. In this age the Church is reigning triumphant, and this passage is just a symbolic look at our time in history.

That brings up a question: is there anyone who *actually believes* that Satan has been bound and rendered powerless? Does anyone think that Satan and his forces of darkness have been neutralized and can no longer deceive anyone or trouble the nations? The apostle Peter sure didn't! Long after Jesus was resurrected, Peter warned that Satan was a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8). *He* didn't believe that Satan had been bound. The apostle Paul warned us that we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against the forces of darkness, and he urged us to take on the whole armor of God so that we can stand against the wiles of the devil. *He* didn't believe the devil had been bound – and that is pretty strong evidence against amillennialism. If the devil hasn't been bound yet then amillennialism can't be true.

There is also the issue that the details don't match up. Amillennialism teaches that when Christ died on the cross He bound Satan. However, in Revelation 20 we see that Satan isn't bound by Christ; instead he is bound by an unnamed angel. Although Christ is mentioned in this passage (remember, the martyrs reign with Christ), *Christ doesn't perform the binding of Satan*. On top of that, the passage does *not* say that Satan was bound by the death of the Lamb; it says that Satan was bound

with a chain. If this passage represents Christ binding Satan at the cross then *Christ should have been the one doing the binding* and the binding should have been accomplished by His death and His shed blood. But we don't see *any* of that here.

There is yet another problem. Verse 6 speaks of a resurrection that happens *before* the reigning begins; it says that people who were martyred for their faith *in Christ* will be raised from the dead and reign with Him. In fact, it is *the martyrs* who are reigning over the world, and they start reigning right after Satan is bound. In other words, Satan is bound, the martyrs are raised from the dead, and the martyrs then reign with Christ. This timeline presents a serious problem for amillennialism because *no one was martyred for their faith in Christ before Christ died!* It's true that there were martyrs in the Old Testament, but they did not believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ because *it hadn't happened yet* and *people didn't know about it yet*. Even if you insist that it's a symbolic reference to the Old Testament saints, that still presents a problem: how many Old Testament saints have been raised from the dead and are now reigning on the Earth? It won't do any good to claim that they are reigning from Heaven because *that is not the same thing as being resurrected* – and, besides, Revelation 5:10 makes it clear that the reigning happens *on Earth*.

For that matter, is the Church reigning over the Earth during this period of history? Not exactly: for most of the past two thousand years the Church has been brutally oppressed, persecuted, hunted down, and slaughtered. Paul says that we and the whole creation are groaning, awaiting our adoption. It is true that God is saving countless people, but it is a bloody process that is full of pain. Christ said “In this world you will have tribulation”, not “in this world you will reign as kings”.

Revelation 20 describes a time when Satan has been neutralized, the dead have been raised, the martyrs are living

again, and the righteous are triumphantly reigning over an Earth where evil has been soundly defeated and the powers of darkness are unable to harm anyone. In *no way* does that even begin to describe the age we are living in now. The details are all wrong.

That only leaves one option. If the millennium is a real thing that is going to happen, and if it hasn't happened yet, then it must happen at some point in the future. If it happens in the future then the premillennial view must be true. At some point in the future there must be a time when Satan will be bound, the dead will be raised, and Christ and the martyrs will reign triumphantly over a peaceful Earth.

From that point it's not hard to work out the rest. Although Revelation does contain symbolic language, the symbols it uses are defined elsewhere in the Bible. (When interpreting Biblical symbolism, never, *ever* assign your own interpretation to the Bible's symbols. Instead, find the verse in the Bible that provides the interpretation of that symbol and use that interpretation.) It's just a matter of looking up the symbols that Revelation uses – and whatever is not symbolic is literal.

Now, some have argued that premillennialism must be wrong because that interpretation is only about a hundred years old. People claim that the Church has been amillennial for most of its history. The truth is that the early church was premillennial: surviving letters from that period show that in the centuries immediately following Christ the Church interpreted end-times and Revelation much as premillennial people do today. However, when the Catholic Church arose in the 5th century they stamped out that view and replaced it with amillennialism – a view that they enforced on pain of death. It was only with the advent of the Reformation that people began to escape Catholicism's clutches and go back to what the Bible actually teaches. Shortly after the Reformation (and long before Darby and the 19th century) people began writing about premillennialism again.

You could just as accurately say that the idea that Christ is the head of the Church is a recent view. That view only became prevalent *after* the Reformation. Before the Reformation the Catholic Church taught that the Pope was the head of the Church (which they still teach today). Many Biblical doctrines appear to be “recent discoveries” because the Catholic Church forced their heretical view on the world for such a long time.

Premillennialism is the only viewpoint that consistently makes sense and doesn't result in bizarre problems. Amillennialism sounds good, but when you look at the details it falls apart. As amazing as it sounds, there really will come a day when Christ will establish an actual, physical kingdom on Earth, centered in Jerusalem. Revelation is not the only book that speaks of it; the Old Testament does as well. That, however, is a subject for another time.

