

Bound Him A Thousand Years

Since there is so much confusion and turmoil about matters relating to end-times and the book of Revelation, I thought it would be a good idea to take a moment and explain what I believe and why I believe 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, leaving 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. This view is utter nonsense and doesn't deserve to be taken seriously. In order for this viewpoint to be true the book of Revelation must have been written before 70 AD. However, it has been proven beyond any doubt that the book was written in the early 90s. This view has other tremendous problems, which I have discussed elsewhere.

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 catastrophically. It is a nice theory but in practice it does not even come close to working.

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.

The only two views that I take seriously are the amillennial view and the premillennial view. Preterism is easy to disprove and is actually silly. Christ has *not* already returned; that is utter nonsense. 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; no matter how hard they try they keep failing. That system of interpretation just does not work.

So, between the two possibilities, 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?

Most people these days are "pan-millennial". They believe that since "it will all pan out in the end", it really doesn't matter one way or another. They're content to ignore the entire issue and go on about their lives. Although that may seem wise, I want to emphasize something: the "I don't really care" viewpoint *is not a Biblical stance*. If your response to *any* Biblical truth is "I don't really care what the Word teaches" then you have a serious problem. The New Testament commands us to watch and be ready; Jesus Himself repeated this several times. Not caring is *not* the same thing as watching and being ready.

Watching and being ready is a far more serious issue than you might think. There are many people out there who are peddling false end-times beliefs that have destroyed the faith of many. Preterists teach that Christ has already returned; if you don't know the truth then how can you refute them? Harold Camping predicted that Jesus would return in May 2012 – and people believed him to such an extent that many sold their houses and their possessions. If you aren't solidly grounded in the truth then how can you refute the Harold Campings of the world? Telling people “your beliefs are obviously stupid” is not a Biblical response. If you have no idea what the truth is then you aren't going to be able to refute anyone. In fact, if you don't know the truth yourself then how are you going to protect *yourself* from being deceived?

I hesitate to mention this, but there is an old conspiracy theory called Project Blue Beam that suggested that the government might try to fake the return of Jesus Christ. I think this theory is utterly preposterous – but it does bring up a point. Satan is the father of lies, and he is quite busy in our age. Jesus warned His followers to beware of false Christs:

Matthew 24:4: “And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.”

Jesus warned that *many* imposters would come and claim to be Him. There would be false Christs and false Second Comings. If you don't know the truth then how will you keep from being deceived? Harold Camping proved that many people can't tell the truth from a lie – and remember, Satan and his demons can appear as angels of light. If the devil staged a false Second Coming, complete with what looked like angels and the appearance of someone who claimed to be Jesus, are you really well-grounded enough to tell the difference between a satanic deception and the real thing? Pan-millennialism is incredibly dangerous because it encourages ignorance, and ignorance has destroyed many lives. You need to know the truth because the truth is the only thing that can protect you.

On top of that, the Bible tells us that we should earnestly desire the return of Christ. If Christ really is the great love of our life and the great passion of our heart then we will long for Him to return and we will be interested in the events surrounding His coming. Telling Jesus “I do love you but I'm just not interested in when you're coming back; you can stay away forever for all I care” is the *opposite* of passion and does not honor the Lord. If you love somebody you will long to see them; if you don't want to see them then you probably don't really care about them at all (or, at the very least, you have a troubled relationship with them).

So how can you decide between premillennialism and amillennialism? It's a tough question, but I believe there is an answer. The passage that convinced me to take one side over the other was this one:

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. He is 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 holds that this should be taken literally while amillennialism says that it should be taken symbolically. So which is it?

Here is what bothered me. The amillennial view says 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. This passage is just a highly 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 believe 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 the Church 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 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. This 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 (the martyrs reign with Christ), *Christ doesn't do the binding of Satan*. On top of that, the passage does *not* say that Satan was bound by the death of the Lamb; instead it says that Satan was bound with a chain. If this passage represented 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 big 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 doing the reigning, and they start right after Satan is bound. So, then, Satan is bound, the Christian martyrs are raised from the dead, and the martyrs then reign with Christ. This timeline presents a really 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 claim "Well, it's just 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. I simply cannot believe we are in the millennium right 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. It's not hard to look them up in the Old Testament and see what it is really talking about. The rest, like the millennium, is literal.

Now, some have argued that premillennialism must be wrong because that interpretation is only about a hundred years old. People claim that for most of history the church has been amillennial. The truth is that the early church was actually 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 because Catholicism teaches that it is the fulfillment of the millennium. For more than a thousand years the Catholic church enforced amillennialism on pain of death. It was only with the advent of the Reformation that people began to escape its 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. After the Reformation, though, people began going back to the Bible.

The reason I am premillennial is because I see it taught in the Bible. It 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.