

The Millennium is Now

By David Feddes

I believe that the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ, the millennium, is now. Before I try to explain why I think that, I want to start with the only passage in the Bible that actually speaks of Christ reigning for a thousand years, Revelation 20:1-10.

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 sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

First, I will summarize very briefly my understanding of this passage. Second, I will present some basic principles of biblical interpretation and of how to approach the book of Revelation as a whole. Then I will dig more deeply into the details of Revelation 20:1-10.

In my understanding, which is shared by many Bible scholars and Christians throughout history, the millennium is now. This means:

- We are living in the period when Satan is bound, cast down, and restrained.
- We are living in the period when Christ's reign is already underway.
- "The first resurrection" has already happened for millions of people.
- Millions have already refused the beast's mark, have come to life, and are now reigning with Christ on heavenly thrones.

You might ask, "How can you think Satan is bound and restrained? We see him doing all kinds of damage!" You might wonder, "How can you say Jesus is reigning when many things in the world are so messed up?" Those are good questions, and we will address them a bit later. For

now, let me just say that we cannot depend only on what we happen to think or feel about these matters. We must pay careful attention to what God says in the Bible. So before getting into details and answering tough questions, let's consider some basics of biblical interpretation and think about how to understand the book of Revelation.

Basics of Biblical Interpretation

- Scripture interprets Scripture
- Clear before difficult
- Literal before figurative
- Big picture before details

Scripture interprets Scripture. The best commentary on any passage of the Bible is other passages of the Bible. If one passage seems hard to understand, see if other passages can shed light on the meaning.

Clear before difficult. As you search the Scriptures, study what is clear before trying to figure out what is more difficult. Go to passages that are easier to understand before you dive into passages that are harder to understand. Revelation 20:1-10 is among the most difficult passages of the Bible, as evidenced by the many different ways people have interpreted it. So before trying to figure out the meaning of this passage, first find out what is taught in clearer passages that deal with similar events and ideas.

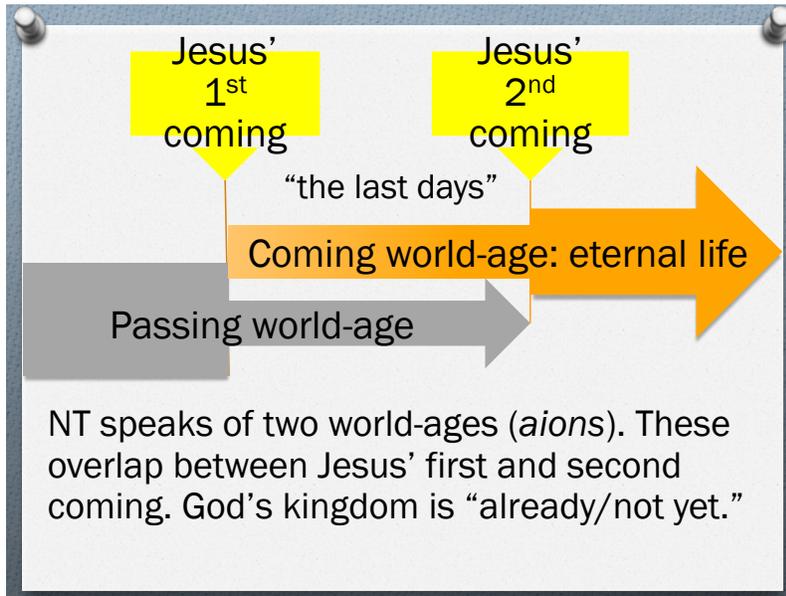
Literal before figurative. When interpreting the Bible, study the literal passages before the more figurative passages. Study the more straightforward prose before you try to figure out what the poetry is hinting at or what some of the mysterious visions might be showing. Don't go to a puzzling, figurative vision and then use that vision to tell you what the more literal, straightforward passages have been saying. Do it the other way around. Take the straightforward passage first, and then examine the more figurative one.

Big picture before details. Get an overall view before trying to figure out smaller details. You can't help noticing some details as you're considering a wider view, but be careful not to become so focused on lesser details that you lose sight of the big picture. When studying any particular detail or sentence of Scripture, keep in mind where the sentence fits in the broader context of a paragraph, in a larger train of thought, in the purpose of a particular Bible book, and in the overall message of the Bible as a whole.

Two World-Ages

The New Testament speaks of two world-ages (*aions*). There is a world-age that is passing away, dominated by evil and rebellion against God. But there's also a coming world-age of God's reign, of all things made new, of eternal life. We live in a time when these two world-ages overlap. Jesus' first coming brought eternity into time and launched the new world-age, which is growing in power but is not yet perfected. In addition, Jesus' first coming, especially his death and resurrection, dealt a fatal blow to the old world-age. It is dying but not yet dead; it continues

until Jesus returns to finish it off. In this time between Jesus' first and second comings, the two world-ages overlap.



This period of overlap is called "the last days." When the New Testament speaks of "the last days," it is rarely speaking only of the final few years before Jesus' second coming. "The last days" usually means the entire period between Jesus' first coming and his second coming. "The last days" began with Jesus' first coming: "In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:2). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was a sign of "the last days." As Peter explained, "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit" (Acts 2:17). James warned greedy people of his time, "You have hoarded wealth in the last days" (James 5:3). John wrote to people of his time, "Dear children, this is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). Paul warned Timothy that in "the last days" some people would be "lovers of themselves, lovers of money... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1-4). Peter warned his readers of scoffers in "the last days" denying that Jesus would return to make all things new. These New Testament statements about "the last days" were not referring only to a brief period just before the end of the world. The New Testament authors were writing about the entire era between Jesus' two comings, when the old world-age and the new world-age overlap.

The two-stage coming of God's kingdom involves an "already" and a "not yet." Already Jesus has come. Already Jesus has done great things in his first coming, in his incarnation and birth, in his life and perfect obedience and miracles and teaching, in his casting out of demons, in his death, in his resurrection and ascension. Jesus' first coming damaged and doomed the evil world-age so that it is passing away. At the same time, Jesus' first coming launched the arrival of God's reign and of the coming world-age where already now those who believe in Jesus have eternal life. They don't yet have the full delight of experiencing that life in its completeness, but their new life in the new era is launched. As Jesus put it, "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." Already the believer has eternal life; already the believer has crossed over from death to life. But the future has not yet fully arrived. Jesus went on to say that "a time is coming when all

who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out” (John 5:24-29). There is an *already* and a *not yet*: already a believer has entered eternal life, but the day has not yet come when all who are in their graves will come out.

So when you think of the big picture in the New Testament, think of a passing world-age and a coming world-age. In "the last days," the period between Jesus' first coming and his second coming, the two ages overlap. The passing world-age in its dying phase overlaps with the coming world-age, already very much alive and moving toward greater fullness until Jesus returns to finish off the old world-age and to perfect the new world-age. Whenever we study particular passages of the New Testament, we must keep in mind the larger framework of these two world-ages and the two-stage coming of the kingdom. Jesus' first coming has a decisive impact in defeating the old and launching the new, and his second coming completes what he started. The second coming brings the old world-age to an absolute end and brings the new world-age of eternal life to its fullness.

Two-Stage Coming of the Kingdom

The two-stage coming of God's kingdom is described in different kinds of New Testament literature: Jesus' parables, Paul's prose, and Revelation's pictures.

Two-Stage Coming of the Kingdom in Christ's Parables

In Matthew 13 Jesus tells parables about the kingdom. His parable of the sower speaks of a farmer scattering seed on different kinds of soil. At harvest time, only the good soil produces a crop. First the Messiah comes as planter; later the Messiah comes as harvester. Between the two stages of planting and harvesting, there is a period where the good seed is alive and developing but not yet fully mature.

Those same two stages appear in Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds. A farmer plants good seed in a field, but then an enemy plants weed seed in that field. When the farmer is asked, "Should we pull out the weeds right away?" he answers, "No, we don't want to uproot any good plants in the process. Let's wait and let them grow together for a while. At harvest time, we'll separate the grain from the weeds and burn the weeds." So there are two main stages, planting and harvesting, with a time in between. In the planting stage, some people become children of God's kingdom through Jesus, but others belong to Satan. At the harvest stage, the angels will throw unconverted evildoers into hell, and the righteous will shine in the perfected kingdom of their Father. Between the two stages of Jesus launching the kingdom and Jesus returning with his angels to judge the world at the end of the age, there is a mixed kingdom, in which the field of the world has children of God's kingdom who have not yet been perfected and unsaved people who have not yet been condemned and cast out.

Jesus tells another parable in Matthew 13, about fishing with a big net. Again, Jesus describes two stages. First comes the stage of catching the fish: the net drags in good fish but also drags in junk, dead fish, or fish that are bad to eat. Next comes the stage of sorting: when the fishermen are back on shore, they keep the good fish and throw away the bad. That's what the kingdom of heaven is like: first comes a stage of catching, later comes a final stage of separating

good from bad, and a time in between when good and bad are mixed together. Jesus' first coming launches the catching stage. His second coming will be the sorting stage, where the angels keep the righteous, while the evil are discarded and burned.

In short, these three parables of Jesus in Mathew 13 indicate the two-stage coming of the kingdom:

- First sowing, then harvesting
- First tolerating weeds, then burning them
- First catching fish, then sorting them

At his first coming, the Messiah comes as planter; at his second coming, the Messiah comes as harvester. Jesus' first coming launches the presence of God's kingdom on earth. Between the two comings, there is a mixed kingdom, with the children of the kingdom and the unsaved still mingling together on earth. After Jesus' second coming, there is a perfected kingdom.



Two-Stage Coming of the Kingdom in Paul's Prose

Paul's letters are mostly prose, describing things in ordinary language rather than parables or symbolic pictures. 1 Corinthians 15 is a key passage about the resurrection of Jesus. Paul writes,

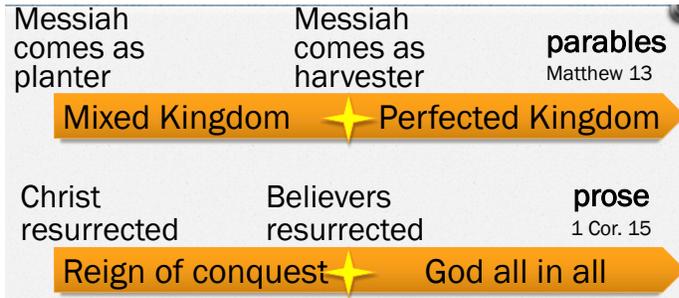
For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:22-26).

Here Paul's prose presents a two-stage understanding of the coming of God's kingdom. Jesus *must reign until...* This means Jesus is already reigning now and is already in the process of destroying his enemies. His present reign and conquest must continue "until he has put all his enemies under his feet." Death is the last enemy to be destroyed. When Jesus comes again, death will be destroyed, all God's people will receive their new resurrection bodies, and Jesus will hand the kingdom over to his Father. Until that day, Jesus must continue to reign and conquer.

Jesus' reign of conquest, putting his enemies under his feet, began during Jesus' first coming. One major activity of Jesus during his life on earth was casting out evil spirits. The kingdom reign of God was already underway. As Jesus himself put it, "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28). But a far greater victory over Satan and the whole demon realm occurred when Jesus died and rose again: "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them" (Colossians

2:15). Jesus' reign of conquest continues from the time Christ was resurrected until the time when Jesus will destroy the last enemy, death, and all believers will be resurrected. Then Jesus will turn things back over to his Father, "that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

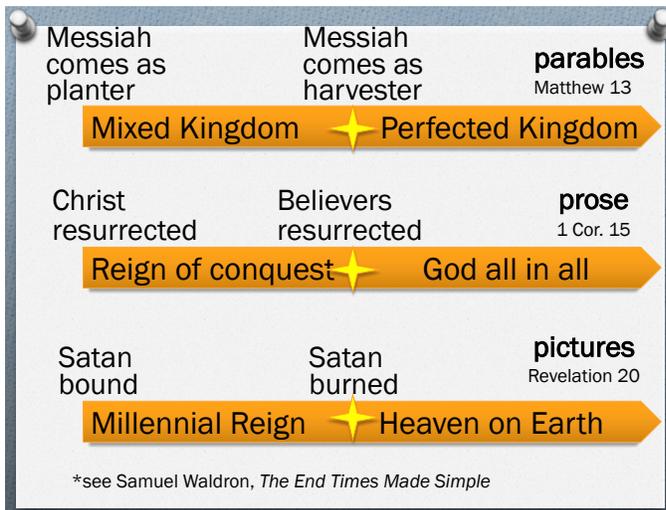
Paul's prose tracks closely with Jesus' parables. Both involve a two-stage coming of the kingdom related to Jesus' first and second coming.



Two-Stage Coming of the Kingdom in Revelation's pictures

Now that we've seen Jesus' parables and Paul's prose, let's look at Revelation's pictures. What do we find in Revelation 20? Like elsewhere in the New Testament, we find two main stages. First Satan is bound and limited; later Satan is burned. In the first resurrection, souls come alive and share Christ's reign. In the second resurrection, bodies too come alive and share Christ's reign as heaven comes to earth. Between those two stages is the thousand years, the millennial reign of Jesus.

The parables of Jesus, the prose of Paul, and the pictures of Revelation are not descriptions of radically different things. All are describing the same two-stage coming of God's kingdom, while using different forms of literature to do so. Revelation 20 is not saying brand new things that are not revealed elsewhere in the New Testament. It is conveying basically the same message and the same scenario as taught by Jesus and Paul, but Revelation is using pictures and visions to display the same reality in a gripping, imaginative form.



Let's quickly review the basics of biblical interpretation:

- Scripture interprets Scripture
- Clear before difficult
- Literal before figurative
- Big picture before details

In studying Revelation 20, we use other Scriptures to interpret this Scripture. In particular, we look at Jesus' parables and Paul's prose dealing with similar things. Revelation 20 is difficult to understand, so we consult passages that are clearer. Revelation 20 is figurative, so we consult passages that contain literal explanation. Paul wrote in prose, and Jesus explained the meaning of the parables we looked at in Matthew 13. Looking at the big picture, we see two world-ages, with the first starting to fade at Jesus' first coming and passing away completely at Jesus' second coming. God's kingdom in Jesus comes in two main stages: the first stage launches Jesus' reign and conquest, and the second stage destroys death, judges the wicked, perfects the godly, and brings eternal heaven on earth. Between Jesus' two comings, the two ages overlap.

That's what we find when we follow basic principles of biblical interpretation and look at Revelation 20 in its wider biblical context. Next let's take note of some things about the book of Revelation as a whole, and then we will focus in on the details of Revelation 20.

Understanding Revelation

The *setting* of Revelation is suffering: a suffering apostle gets a message for suffering churches. The apostle John is on a prison island called Patmos. It's a place of exile and imprisonment, with no escape. While John is there praying in the Spirit, Jesus himself appears to John in a glorious vision and gives him a message for these suffering churches. To understand Revelation, we must remember that it's not a book of complicated puzzles for scholars to chat about in their spare time. It's a message for suffering Christians. They need to know that Christ is reigning, that Christ is with them, and that the powers of evil are not winning and are not running unchecked. That's the setting.

The *style* of the message in Revelation is apocalyptic. Apocalyptic is a form of literature that uses symbolic pictures and numbers to reveal something. Today the word *apocalypse* often means a huge disaster, but the original meaning of the word is "revelation." Apocalypse means something is unveiled or revealed. As a style of literature in the Bible, apocalyptic often uses symbolic pictures and numbers that aren't to be taken literally but grip the imagination and stir the soul with realities that are revealed more literally in other passages. Apocalyptic communicates not just with your logic but with your imagination and your heart.

Overlapping visions occur in the Book of Revelation. Some of the same events are pictured several times in different visions. When you read Revelation, you shouldn't automatically assume that what you read about in Revelation 16 must happen later than what you read about in Revelation 6. Revelation 6 speaks of the very end and of the kings and the nations calling out on the rocks to fall on them. Some events that appear in later chapters of Revelation actually happen before events described in Revelation 6. Bible scholar William Hendriksen calls it *progressive*

parallelism. A vision of Revelation unfolds for a while; then comes a new vision, but that new vision might not be about an entirely different set of events. It may be picturing many of the same realities and events but from a different angle and using different pictures. Some plays and films use a similar technique: they show you what is happening to one character in one part of a battle, and then they switch back in time to what has been happening to other characters in other parts of the same battle. Even though a scene appears later in the film than a previous scene, you can't assume that all events in the new scene happened after all events in the previous scene. Some events in a scene that appears later in the film may have actually happened earlier than some events in a scene that appeared earlier, or events in both scenes may be happening at the same time. The scenes may overlap, even though one scene is shown before the other. In a similar way, Revelation uses overlapping visions. Visions of later chapters return to some of the same events as visions from earlier chapters and offer different angles on the same realities. Visions often overlap and are not always in exact chronological sequence.

Another key for understanding Revelation is that prophetic visions can have *multiple fulfillments*. For instance, Revelation pictures the beast, the false prophet, and the prostitute Babylon. These may refer to awful entities that will take power near the end of the world, but there can be partial, preliminary fulfillments before the final fulfillment. The beast of Revelation may refer to a final antichrist figure, but many antichrists have already come (1 John 2:18; 4:3). The false prophet of Revelation may refer to one especially deceptive miracle worker shortly before Jesus returns, but many false prophets have already come (Matthew 7:15; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1). Babylon may refer to a rich, powerful, anti-God civilization near the end of history, but Babylon is already at work in various forms, and has been at work in one form or another ever since the tower of Babel described near the beginning of the Bible. Throughout Scripture, Babylon represents demon-dominated human civilization in rebellion against God. So the prophetic visions of Revelation can have multiple fulfillments. Prophecies that speak of powers and events at the very end of history can also reveal things that come sooner, even though they haven't yet appeared in their final form.

Some details of Revelation may remain hard to understand, but the *core message* is very clear: JESUS WINS! SATAN LOSES! Sometimes when people think about Revelation and the end of the world, they tend to focus on the bad stuff. But never forget the main message: JESUS WINS! SATAN LOSES! So don't spend so much time worrying over every detail related to bad guys and battles and tribulations that you're not looking forward eagerly to the coming of Jesus Christ and to his final victory. God is directing history toward its final goal in Christ. If you know Jesus wins and the powers of evil lose, then make sure you are on the right side, and stay focused on the victory that is already in progress. When you see the clash of good and evil, make sure you remain loyal to Christ and confess him even if it costs your life, because in giving your life for the sake of Jesus, you gain eternal life. Jesus' enemies may grow fiercer for a time, but they will burn forever. Jesus' friends may suffer for a time, but they will rejoice forever. That is the good news of Revelation for suffering churches.

Seminary professor Vern Poythress has written a commentary on Revelation. Poythress tells about some seminary students who were playing basketball. After the game, they walked past a janitor who was sitting nearby, reading a book.

"What are you reading?"

"The Bible."

"What part of the Bible?"

"Revelation."

We'll help this poor soul, they thought. "Do you understand what you are reading?"

"Yes!"

They were astonished. "What does it mean?"

"Jesus is gonna win!"

The janitor knew the core message of Revelation. It's clear, not complicated. Never forget it.

Summary of five keys for understanding Revelation:

1. Setting: suffering apostle gets message for suffering churches
2. Style of message: apocalyptic (symbolic pictures and numbers)
3. Overlapping visions: some of the same events are pictured several times in different visions
4. Multiple fulfillments: beast, false prophet, and Babylon are already working in various forms, leading to final and ultimate Antichrist
5. Core message: JESUS WINS! SATAN LOSES!

The Millennium is Now

Equipped with some basic principles of biblical interpretation and of how to approach the book of Revelation as a whole, let's dig more deeply into the details of Revelation 20:1-10 and the millennial reign of Christ.

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 (Revelation 20:1-3)

I believe that the millennium is the entire period between Jesus' first coming and his second coming. The millennium is now.

- We are living in the period when Satan is bound, cast down, and restrained.
- We are living in the period when Christ's reign is already underway.
- "The first resurrection" has already happened for millions of people.
- Millions have already refused the beast's mark, have come to life, and are now reigning with Christ on heavenly thrones.

You might wonder, "How can the millennium be now? The passage speaks of a thousand years, but more than 2,000 years have already passed since Jesus' first coming. How can that period be the thousand years of Revelation 20? A thousand means a thousand, doesn't it?"

A thousand years in John's vision does not necessarily mean a thousand years of literal time. Much in this passage is not literal. Satan is not literally a dragon or a serpent. Satan is a fallen archangel. No picture can show what he literally looks like because he's a spirit being. John's vision is a symbolic picture, showing that Satan is terrible like a dragon or a giant serpent, but he's not literally a dragon. Also, he's not in a literal hole in the ground bound by a literal chain. This is a symbolic picture showing that Satan has been limited. Now, if the dragon is a picture, if the chain is a picture, if the key is a picture, if the pit is a picture, and if all these pictures are symbolic and not literal, then don't you think the thousand years might also be symbolic and not literal? The Bible uses numbers figuratively in apocalyptic literature such as Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation. If the thousand-year period appeared in a letter of Paul, then it would more likely be literal, because Paul was writing straightforward prose. But this is not a passage of Paul's prose. Revelation 20 is apocalyptic literature, which is highly figurative and symbolic. If so much else in the vision is symbolic, then the thousand years may also be symbolic. A thousand is ten cubed ($10 \times 10 \times 10$) and may symbolize a long and yet limited period of time.

Satan Bound and Thrown Down

We are living in the period when Christ's reign is already underway and when Satan is bound, cast down, and restrained. You might wonder, "How can this be, when Satan is obviously still causing lots of evil and suffering?" Remember the principles of biblical interpretation: interpret difficult passages in light of clear passages, and figurative passages in light of literal passages. To understand when the binding of Satan occurs, let's look at some straightforward statements of Jesus and New Testament authors.

Jesus said, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?" (Matt 12:28-29) God's kingdom reign arrived in Jesus, and Satan was bound. Jesus was saying, in effect, "By my coming and in my exorcism of demons, I am showing that I have bound 'the strong man,' the bully. I have bound Satan." So when did the binding of Satan occur? At Jesus' first coming.

After Jesus' disciples returned from a successful mission on which Jesus had sent them, Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you" (Luke 10:18-19). Jesus said this to disciples who were going to be persecuted, who were going to face all kinds of opposition; and still today, Jesus' followers face attacks from Satan. Even so, Jesus said that he saw Satan fall and was giving his disciples authority to trample on the enemy.

Shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world [Satan] be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:31-32). When does this casting out of Satan occur? Not in the distant future. It happened when Jesus was lifted up on the cross, resurrected from the dead, and lifted up to heaven. "Cast out" in this statement of Jesus is the same Greek root word for "cast" or "threw" in Revelation 20, where Satan is cast into the pit. Remember, use a clear passage to interpret a more difficult or symbolic passage. Already Jesus has bound and cast out the devil.

The apostle John wrote the symbolic visions of Revelation, but John also wrote letters that were more literal and less symbolic. When writing prose, John said, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). John didn't write, "The Son of God *will* appear and *will* destroy the works of the devil." John wrote that Jesus had already done this. The Son of God *appeared* [past tense]. Jesus' first coming was to destroy the devil's works.

Hebrews is another New Testament book that is more prose than symbol. The author says that Jesus became human and died " so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil (Hebrews 2:14). The most decisive blow struck against Satan came in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The apostle Paul's prose says, "And you, who were dead in your trespasses ... God made alive together with him, having forgiven us ... nailing [our debt] to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (Colossians 2:13-15). Paul doesn't just say Jesus *will disarm* Satan; he says Jesus already *disarmed* (past tense] Satan.

New Testament prose says again and again that Jesus has already bound, cast out, disarmed, and defeated Satan. This is what Revelation 20 is picturing when it envisions the dragon being bound and cast into a pit. Satan is limited and confined. We are living in the symbolic thousand-year period when Satan has been bound, cast down, and restrained.

We can strengthen our understanding of Revelation 20 not only by comparing it to statements from other New Testament books but also by comparing it to another vision in Revelation, found in chapter 12. Keep in mind that the visions of Revelation often overlap. Revelation 20 speaks of a dragon; this dragon first appears in Revelation 12.

The dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne. Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was *thrown down*, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was *thrown down* to the earth, and his angels were *thrown down* with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been *thrown down*, who accuses them day and night before our God (Revelation 12:4-10).

In this vision, the people of God longed for the birth of the Messiah. When the child was born, Satan tried to destroy him, but this male child, Jesus, ascended to God and to his throne in heaven. Michael and the good angels threw down the dragon and the fallen angels. This victory came with the ascension of Jesus. In the original Greek wording, "thrown down" in Revelation 12 is the same Greek root as "casting into the pit" in Revelation 20:3. Comparing Revelation 12 and Revelation 20, we see many parallels. Both have a scene in heaven. In both passages, angels defeat demons: in chapter 12, Michael and his angels defeat Satan and the demons; in chapter 20,

an angel captures and binds Satan. In Revelation 12, Satan is cast to earth; in Revelation 20, Satan is cast into a pit. In Revelation 12, Satan is filled with fury because he knows his time is short; in Revelation 20, Satan is to be set free for a short time after being imprisoned. Revelation 12 portrays Satan's fall and the reign of Christ and his saints; so does Revelation 20. In Revelation 12, the saints triumph as martyrs by the word of their testimony; in Revelation 20, the reigning saints are people who died for the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 12	Revelation 20
heavenly scene (v. 7)	heavenly scene (v. 1)
Michael & angels defeat Satan & demons (v. 7-8)	an angel captures and binds Satan (v. 2)
Satan cast to earth (v. 9)	Satan cast into pit (v. 3)
Satan “filled with fury because he knows his time is short” (v. 12)	Satan to be “set free for a short time” after being imprisoned” (v. 3)
Satan’s fall & reign of Christ and saints (v. 10)	Satan’s fall & reign of Christ and saints (v. 4)
Saints triumph as martyrs by “the word of their testimony (v. 11)	Reigning saints died “for the testimony of Jesus” (v. 4)

Revelation 12 focuses on the impact of Jesus' birth and ascension. It's about his first coming and its impact on Satan during the time that followed Jesus' ascension. Revelation 20 overlaps this. Given the strong parallels between Revelation 12 and Revelation 20, it makes sense to think that the thousand years of Revelation 20 is the period that begins with Jesus' first coming.

The millennium is now. We're living in the period when Satan is bound. We're living in the period when Christ's reign is underway. We've established that by looking at different strands of Scripture about the present reign of Jesus and the binding and casting down of Satan.

The First Resurrection

Revelation 20 goes on to speak of something called "the first resurrection" and of people who reign with Christ for a thousand years.

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 (Revelation 20:4-6).

The first resurrection is not a far-off future event. "The first resurrection" has already happened for millions of people. Millions have already refused the beast's mark, have come to life, and are now reigning with Christ on heavenly thrones. This doesn't mean that there's no final beast still to come. Keep in mind what I said earlier about multiple fulfillments of prophecy. Earlier versions of the beast enter history before the final beast shows up. So even if you're not living in the period when the final beast comes, you in your own setting must reject the mark of the beast and stand up against the enemies of Christ. You may be killed for doing so, but then you will experience the first resurrection and reign with Christ on a heavenly throne. After death, the souls of Christians go to be with Christ and are made perfect. They receive a fullness of eternal life in Jesus' presence. They receive a great promotion, and they begin to reign with Christ. They were born again to new life already during their time on earth, and when their soul goes to be with Christ in heaven, they enjoy Christ more directly and share in his reign. This is the first resurrection: souls of dead Christians coming to life in heaven, enjoying Jesus, and sharing in his reign. When Jesus returns to earth on judgment day, their bodies will also be raised and glorified in the final resurrection. But the first resurrection comes sooner: at the point when believers die and their souls come alive in Jesus' presence. They will never be subject to the second death, which is punishment in hell.

Satan Restrained, then Released

Keep in mind the original setting of Revelation: a suffering apostle gets a message for suffering churches. Revelation is not just a book about the very end of history; it encourages the suffering church in every age and warns the tempted church in every age. "As you heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrist have come" (1 John 2:18). That's what John says when he's writing prose. So when John offers pictures in Revelation, we need to understand that the beast, the false prophet, and the prostitute Babylon represent not just future entities but forces already at work in the present. The beast represents *political persecution* against believers. The false prophet represents *religious deception*, false religion, efforts to corrupt the faith or to lead people away from trusting in Jesus as God and Savior. The prostitute Babylon represents *cultural seduction*, a society that is trying to lure you into evil by peer pressure, financial gain, corrupt entertainment, and worldly desire. The beast, the false prophet, and the prostitute are not just future problems. If you're a Christian, and especially if you're a church leader, you must be alert to the forces of political persecution, religious deception, and cultural seduction right now.

Such enemies are at work in the period between Jesus' two comings but are restrained until the loosing of Satan and the coming of the final Man of Sin. When Revelation pictures Satan as a dragon bound by a chain, think of it as a leash. The leash limits his reach, but it doesn't make him totally powerless. We are living in the millennium, when Satan is cast down and his power is limited much more than in the age before Jesus came, but he can still do much damage. "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Whether pictured as dragon or a lion, Satan is limited but dangerous. While he is bound, Satan cannot deceive all the nations at once. He cannot unleash a global effort to wipe out all Christians at once. He poses a serious but limited danger.

Near the end of history, the restraint will be taken away, and Satan will be set loose to do his worst. The Man of Sin, the beast, the final antichrist, will exercise the full power of Satan (2

Thessalonians 2:3-7). Satan will do his worst. But even his unrestrained worst will fail, because God will preserve his chosen, and Christ will come again to destroy the beast, the false prophet, and Satan himself.

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 sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:7-10).

Gog and Magog first appear in Ezekiel 38-39. In Ezekiel's visions, Gog and Magog don't just decide to fight God's people. God himself lures them to the battle. They think they're in charge, but God is really the one in charge, and he's setting them up for their final fall. God lets Satan and his henchmen take their best shot, and then God easily wipes them out with a blast of fire that carries his enemies into the eternal fire of hell.

In the premillennial view, which expects a literal thousand-year reign of Christ in the future, the throwing of Satan into the lake of fire will occur more than a thousand years after the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire. Premillennial Christians think everything in Revelation 19 happens before anything in Revelation 20. But that is not so. Visions in Revelation overlap. Think of it more like a novel that shows what is happening to one group of characters for a chapter. Then a new chapter begins, and the book backtracks in time to follow a different set of characters for a while and show how things unfold with them. Or think of it as scenes from a movie, where one scene shows one set of characters in a battle, and then the next scene switches to a different set of characters and shows what was happening to them during the same battle. The movie might backtrack somewhat and give a bit of a replay of the same battle but with the focus on different characters than in the previous scene. That is what's happening in Revelation 19 and 20. In chapter 19 the camera focuses mainly on what happens to the beast and the false prophet on judgment day: Christ defeats them and throws them into the lake of fire. Then Revelation 20 backtracks a bit to show us what becomes of Satan himself. When the camera was following the beast and the false prophet in chapter 19, it didn't show Satan or his final punishment. This doesn't mean that Satan will not be judged at the same time as the beast and the false prophet. It just means the visionary camera focuses on the beast and the false prophet in chapter 19, and then in chapter 20 the camera zooms in on the dragon and what becomes of him. The dragon ends up in the same place as the beast and the false prophet. Though different visions appear, the events occur at the same time; the events are different aspects of judgment day. There will not be a thousand-year gap between the judgment of antichrist and the judgment of Satan. There are not two final rebellions, one led by the beast and then another, a thousand years later, led by Satan. No, the final rebellion is all one: the rebellion led by the beast and the false prophet is the same rebellion in which Satan deceives the nations and gathers them for battle against God's people. There is one final judgment day, on which the beast, the false prophet, and Satan are thrown into the lake of fire on the day Jesus comes again.

Summary

I have presented an understanding of the thousand-year reign of Christ held by most Christians throughout most of church history. This view is often called "amillennial," but that label might be misleading: "a-millennial" can mean "no-millennial," but a more accurate label is "now-millennial." The point is not that there is no millennium; the point is that the millennium is now. Here's a summary of what the Bible teaches about the millennium and the future of the world, as understood by amillennial Christians.

- We are living in the period when Satan is bound, cast down, and restrained.
- We are living in the period when Christ's reign is already underway.
- "The first resurrection" has already happened for millions of people.
- Millions have already refused the beast's mark, have come to life, and are now reigning with Christ on heavenly thrones.
- Near the close of the present millennium, Satan will be released and antichrist unleashed.
- Jesus will come with his angels, loudly and visibly.
- Dead believers will be resurrected, living believers will be transformed, and together they will be caught up to meet Christ and welcome him to earth.
- Antichrist and unbelievers will be slain.
- All unbelieving dead will then be resurrected.
- All will be judged according to God's records and whether they are in the book of life.
- Satan and all God's enemies will go to hell.
- Christ will present his church to the Father, heaven will come to earth, and believers reign with Christ forever.

Jesus has begun to reign, and his followers have begun to reign. That reign will be perfected when Jesus comes again, and that reign will never end. It won't last just a thousand years followed by a rebellion. No, we're living now in the millennium. And when the final rebellion comes and this age ends, Jesus will return to make all things new. We will live in God's perfected kingdom for all eternity.