

# **Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 26, Revelation 20, The Binding of Satan and Introduction to the Millennium**

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 26 on Revelation 20, The Binding of Satan and the Introduction to the Millennium.

Revelation 20 contains probably the most well-known feature of the book of Revelation. If you ask someone about what they associate the book of Revelation with, sometime along the line, they will turn to Revelation 20 in their minds and think of the millennial text, the picture in chapter 20 of the Thousand-Year Reign. So what I want to do is talk a little bit about chapter 20 and not only focus on the idea of the Millennium itself but also look at the chapter as a whole as far as how it functions within Revelation. But we will talk a little bit about the Millennium and a way to understand that, I think, that is consistent with the rest of the book and how it functions.

One of the most important principles for understanding this section, I think, beginning with chapter 20, is that we saw that chapter 19 and verse 11 begin a new section in the book, a section that spans from 19:11 all the way through chapter 21 and verse 8. We said chapters 17 and 18 in the first few verses of 19, and then chapter 21:9 through 22:5 are two paired sections comparing and especially contrasting the prostitute Babylon and the New Jerusalem Rome. Then, in between is this section comprised of 19:11 through 21:8 that uses various images to portray and interpret the meaning of the second coming of Christ. So, with chapter 19 and verse 11, I think we're at the very end of history.

We're at the second coming of Christ, and that entire section portrays a variety of scenes that describe what will take place when Christ returns to earth at his second coming. What is significant, then, is that chapter 20 should be seen in light of this broader series of events. I think what we'll see in chapter 20, as well as all the way from chapters 19 and 11 through the end of chapter 20, probably once more conveys a series of events or scenes that roughly describe the same event.

That is, 19 through 20 should not necessarily be taken as a series of events that will occur in chronological order. But remember, John will preface his vision with, then I saw, and then I saw. That indicates primarily the visionary sequence, the sequence in which he saw it, not necessarily the sequence in which things will happen.

So chapter 20, the events in chapter 20 should not necessarily be seen as happening in a strict chronological order but should be seen in terms of a variety of perspectives

or a variety of ways of looking at what happens when Jesus Christ returns or to explore the meaning and the significance of what takes place when Christ returns to consummate God's plan for history. In chapter 19, as well as verses 11 through 21, we see that Christ returns in the form of a battle that probably signifies a final judgment where all the people of the earth are judged, including the two beasts, the beast and the false prophet from Revelation chapter 13. Now, in chapter 20, we find that in a further chapter 20 being a further series of judgment scenes primarily.

So, chapter 20, the main theme of chapter 20 is still one of judgment, in my opinion. In chapter 20, we'll see now that Satan will also be judged and deposed, much like the beast was. So one important feature we've already suggested is, intriguingly, chapters 19 and 20, judge or remove the two beasts and the dragon in the reverse order they were introduced in chapters 12 and 13.

Chapter 20 combines three different scenes, all of them divided. I saw the first scene is found in the first three verses, and they're all linked, but the first scene is found in the first three verses. And that is the binding of Satan in an abyss for a thousand years. The second scene is in chapter 20, verses four and 10, and that is the resurrection of the saints who were martyred and their thousand-year reign followed by a final battle with Satan.

Satan was released and mounted a final war. And then the third and last scene in chapter 20 is in verses 11 through 15, and that is the great white throne judgment. The first two scenes are bound together by the mention of the thousand-year period that we'll look at.

And, uh, what I want to do before examining each of these three scenes in chapter 20 is to read it, chapter 20, and start with verse one. And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

He threw him into the abyss and locked and sealed it over him to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. And after that, he must be set free for a short time. I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.

And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus. And because of the word of God, they had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and they 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 resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection.

The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle. In number, they are like the sand on the seashore.

They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city that he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown.

They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them.

And I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne and books were opened. Then, another book, the Book of Life, was opened. The dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books.

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them. And each person was judged according to what he had done. Then, death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. So what I want to do is look at each of those three sections.

The first one then is verses one through three, the vision of Satan being bound and thrown into an abyss for a period of a thousand years, after which he will be released for a short period of time. Now recall again, the two beasts have already been judged and thrown into the lake of fire, the beast and the false prophet. Now Satan is introduced, and his judgment is introduced but in two stages.

Part of the background is the dragon from chapter 12. You perhaps noted some of the connections back to chapters 12 and 13. The mention of a dragon, which is just like he was described back in chapter 12, verse nine, is called the ancient serpent, which is the devil or Satan.

So now that same dragon from chapter 12 is reintroduced here. Again, the figure of a dragon symbolizes chaos and evil and resembles or draws on the sea monsters from earlier Old Testament texts, for example. Now, Satan's demise is introduced, but in two separate stages.

So it's interesting: Satan isn't simply thrown into the lake of fire. His judgment is introduced in two separate stages. First of all, he is bound in the pit, the abyss, and then second, he's let out and finally is thrown into the lake of fire towards the end of chapter 20.

Now we've already been introduced to the abyss. We've seen that the abyss or pit throughout Revelation has played a role in indicating the house of the demons, the home of demonic beings, the prison of demonic beings. So, the locusts come out of it in chapter nine, and the locusts are clearly identified with demonic figures.

The beast comes out of the abyss in chapter 11, and now Satan is thrown into the abyss and locked. So Satan is returned to the abyss, the prison house of the demonic beings. Now, the text begins with an angel coming down with a chain, ready to grab the dragon and bind him.

And again, it's sort of interesting that God does not do this, or not even Jesus does this, but all that is required is for an angel to do this. Again, this suggests that there's no dualism in the book, but God is portrayed as sovereign, and so his angelic beings can do things like this, even binding Satan. It's possible that this is the same angel in chapter nine, verse one, that came down with the key to the abyss to allow the locust out.

But what I want to suggest is this: not only the idea of locking Satan in the abyss but letting him back out so that he goes into judgment in the lake of fire, into the final judgment. This two-fold or two-stage judgment of Satan seems to reflect, I think, seems to reflect a common conception of how demonic evil beings are judged from the Old Testament and also apocalyptic literature. So, for example, if you go back to Isaiah chapter 24 and verses 21 and 22, a section that deals with sections 24 through 26 of Isaiah is often labeled the little apocalypse.

But in 21 and 22, in that day, the Lord will punish the powers in heaven above and the kings on earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners, bound in a dungeon. They will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days.

So, notice that two-fold. First, they will be bound in a prison, locked in a prison, and then sometime later, they will be judged. You find similar language in some apocalyptic text.

For example, in 1 Enoch chapter 10 and verses 4 through 6. 1 Enoch 10, and this is verse 4, and secondly, the Lord said to Raphael, who is an angelic being, bind Azazel hand and foot and throw him into the darkness. And so he made a hole in the desert, which was in Dudael, and cast him there. He threw on top of him a rugged and sharp rock, and he covered his face in order that he might not see the light and in order that he may be sent into the fire on the great day of judgment.

So, notice again this Azazel, which may be some key demonic leader, or maybe even Satan himself, thrown into a pit, covered over with rocks until the day of judgment. You find a similar scene in another apocalyptic text, 2 Enoch, and in chapter 7, we read, and there, this is verses 1 and 2, and there, I perceive prisoners under guard, hanging up, waiting for the measureless judgment. And those angels have the appearance of darkness themselves.

So, now you have another picture of angelic beings in prison, locked up, waiting for the day of judgment. So, this is not their final judgment. They're locked up until the time of judgment.

You could also read 2 Peter chapter 2 and verse 4. In 2 Peter chapter 2 and verse 4, I think we find Peter appealing to and relying on the same imagery and the same story. Perhaps 1 Peter 3, as well as the spirits in prison in that section. But 2 Peter in verse 2, I'm sorry, chapter 2 and verse 4, for if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but he sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy judgments to be held for judgment.

So, note again this theme of demonic angelic beings locked up in prison awaiting the day of judgment. And the idea is they'd be let out of prison to go into their judgment. I've already mentioned this may lie behind the description of the beast back in chapter 17, where he was described as the one who was, who is not, and who is coming, but he goes into judgment.

But here, I think, I think the author is drawing on that image from the Old Testament, from apocalyptic literature, the same image you find, for example, in 2 Peter 2:4, and probably Jude 6 as well, that now John draws in that to depict the final judgment of Satan himself, the archetypal, evil, demonic being, which is Satan himself. Now, he is also judged in two stages. First of all, locking him in prison.

Second, letting him out to go into judgment. And so, I think that provides the model for why John depicts Satan's judgment in two stages here. Jesus also talks about the binding of Satan.

For example, in Matthew 12:29, he talks about the binding of the strong man. God's kingdom cannot, can only arrive if someone comes to bind the strong man, which is Satan himself. Luke chapter 10, verse 18, talks about Jesus saying, I saw Satan fall like lightning.

Some have suggested that this is the imagery that John draws on or that John is reflecting Jesus' teaching. That is certainly possible, but probably we should see that Jesus' own teaching, the inauguration, and the arrival of the kingdom of God were

the initial binding. And now we see the final binding of Satan and the final judgment that takes place at the second coming of Christ.

Again, I think it's an important principle to understand that from 19, verse 11, through to chapter 21, we find a series of events that I think takes place at the second coming of Christ. So, the binding of Satan, when Jesus' kingdom brought God's kingdom to earth at his first coming, was an initial binding that now finds its consummation in the final binding of Satan at the second coming of Christ. In other words, as Grant Osborne says in his commentary, Satan is completely bound in the abyss, and he cannot escape.

And the reason it said he's bound in the abyss is so that he's no longer able to deceive the nations. This was his primary role starting in Genesis 3, where he deceives Adam and Eve. In chapter 12 and verse 9, he's described as deceiving the nations.

And once again, notice the connection between chapter 20 and chapter 12. And we'll see a couple of other connections later. So, Satan is no longer able to deceive the nations.

And we'll ask why that might be, but when he finally is released, he is able to find the nations receptive once more to his deceiving power and mount a final assault or attack on the people of God later on in chapter 20. But at this point, for this thousand years, he is not able to deceive the nations. Although it's not exactly clear at this point why he's not permitted to deceive the nations, at least I don't think.

So now that Satan has been bound, and again, what I want to emphasize is I think the main theme of chapter 20 is still one of judgment, of the binding and the final judgment of Satan himself. And it does end with a scene of final judgment, but the binding and judgment of Satan seems to be the primary point in chapter 20. Now that Satan has been bound for a thousand years, the next few verses, especially verses four through six, tell us what happens during that thousand years.

In fact, you could remove verses four through six, and one through three would flow naturally into seven through ten. Seven begins with when the thousand years are over; Satan will be released from his prison. Again, I think reflecting those apocalyptic texts and Old Testament background of how the demons are dealt with and judged.

But verses four through six is kind of, in a sense, an insertion, not a digression, but in the midst of this two-stage binding and judgment of Satan, you find verses four through six describing what happens during that thousand-year period. And that is, the saints come to life, and they're raised, and now they reign with Christ for a

thousand years. Until that period of a thousand years is over, then Satan is let out again.

But what I want to do is look at this text, again, from the standpoint of how it has often been looked at in church history, but I want to keep an eye on how it is actually functioning, I think, in this text, broader context, and in the book of Revelation. The text begins with a vision of thrones in verse four, which the thrones clearly recall, as used throughout the book, all the way back in chapters four and five, clearly recall the notion of kingship, authority, and sovereignty. So now the author sees thrones, plural, but he doesn't tell us how many thrones.

Some have speculated this is the 24 thrones of the elders, but I don't think, from chapters four and five, that's possible. But John doesn't say that it's the 24 elders; he just uses the plural thrones. And then he says, on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.

It's also interesting that he doesn't tell us even who it is who sits on the thrones. Another way of putting it is, what is the relationship between those who sit on the thrones in the first half of verse four and now the second half of verse four, where John says, and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony. Is this a separate group? So do you have one group seated on thrones, and then now you have a different group, those who have been beheaded because of their testimony? Or I wonder if we should take this as referring to the same group, again from different perspectives.

John sees thrones and those seated on them. Now he's going to describe in more detail who those people are, who are seated on the thrones. That's, I think, one way of looking at it.

Some have suggested those seated on the thrones in verse four are angelic beings. One of the reasons is that the background for this text seems to be Daniel's chapter seven. We've seen that Daniel chapter seven, as well as the whole book of Daniel throughout Revelation.

But Daniel 7 has played a critical role at points. In Daniel chapter seven, it seems to be the heavenly counsel that renders judgment in Daniel chapter seven. So some have suggested those on the thrones in verse four, the first part of verse four, would be the heavenly counsel, perhaps angelic beings.

They're the ones now that render judgment. And then the souls of those beheaded would be the saints, those who have suffered and who have died at the hands of the beast. However, I wonder if, first of all, when you look at texts like chapter three, verse 21, back in chapter three and verse 21, where one of the promises to the overcomer is to him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.

And I realized that singular there, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. So, is it possible that we should see these thrones as the ultimate fulfillment for the overcomers? These are the overcomers that now occupy the throne.

Furthermore, whatever the case, those who have been the souls of those beheaded in the second part of chapter four, because of their testimony, are the ones in the rest of the four who reign. They come to life, and they reign, which is exactly what the thrones are there for. So, I wonder if the best way to look at it again is to see both halves of verse four as simply different ways of depicting the same group.

So John sees thrones and those seated on them. And then, second, he sees the same beings, but now he describes them as the souls of those who were beheaded for their testimony, those who do not worship the beast or his image. And now they came to life, and they reigned on those thrones for a thousand years.

So probably 4A and 4B, the two groups both introduced by, I saw, probably describe the same group. Now, one other thing to draw attention to in verse four, most translations translate the first part of verse four, I saw thrones on which were seated those who were given authority to judge. That is literally, more literally, and wouldn't leave the text saying judgment was given to them.

Another way to read this, and I think better, is to read it: judgment was given for them, or judgment was given on their behalf. That is a judgment is being rendered in their favor. So the picture obviously later on the text says, and they reign, but the point of this then would be that judgment is given or rendered on their behalf or in their favor.

That is going back to Daniel chapter seven and especially verse 22, the saints here are finally vindicated. This is the vindication of the saints. This is the ultimate answer to the cry of the martyrs.

Now they come to life and they reign for a thousand years. That is judgment is given and rendered on their behalf. Judgment is rendered on their favor.

Now, in fulfillment of Daniel chapter seven, they are vindicated by being raised to life and reigning with Christ for a thousand years, which is the exact period of Satan's binding in verses one through three. Now, why this is important? We said chapter 20, especially through verse 10, is primarily dealing with the judgment of Satan. But in the midst of that, notice we've already noted some connections with chapter 12, and that is Satan is identified in the exact same way that he was back in chapter 12.



He is the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil or Satan, chapter 12 and verse nine. Notice also the description in verse four of the souls on the altar, which under the souls who have been beheaded, which actually goes back to chapter six and verses nine through 11, the souls under the altar who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. But now notice also that it says they had not worshiped the beast or his image, and they had not received his mark on their forehead or hands, which takes you back to chapter 13 as well.

So, what I think is going on here is those who, as part of the judgment of Satan in chapter 20, now you have, as part of that judgment, you now have the vindication of the saints who suffered at the hands of Satan and the beasts. Thus, all those connections back to chapters 12 and 13, and also the fifth seal, those who had been slain and who now were under the altar. So, here is the vindication of the saints.

What I want you to notice is that, as part of Satan's judgment, note the complete reversal that takes place. Satan ruled and put the saints to death. Now you have a complete reversal.

The saints come to life, and now they reign while Satan has been locked up in an abyss, and he is no longer able to do his deceptive work, and he is no longer able to engage in any activity. Now, everyone can perceive the complete vindication of the saints. So, that reversal is important.

The exact reversal of chapters 12 and 13, where Satan ruled, Satan's kingdom reigned supreme, and he was able to put to death the saints. Remember, pursuing the seed of the woman and the authority he gave to the two beasts. So, Satan ruled; he put the saints to death.

Now, in a complete reversal, Satan is bound, his kingdom is taken away, and now the saints reign and they come to life so that we find that they are vindicated. Another question that arises is, more specifically, who are these souls who have been beheaded, and are they the same group as those who worship the beast or the image and have not received the mark on the forehead? Some have perceived two different groups: those who had actually been beheaded and then anyone else who refused to worship the beast. So, that could be people who lived, so that the assumption is not everyone was martyred or killed for their faith, and John is only aware of one person so far, and that is Antipas, though he thinks others are coming.

But some have suggested we have two separate groups here: those who have been martyred for their faith and another group that is a little broader than that, everyone who did not worship the beast and his image and who refused the mark back in chapter 13. However, I wonder if we can really separate these two so easily. That is, when I read Revelation, I doubt that John would have perceived those who refused to worship the beast and his image and who refused to receive the mark would not

have, at least in the visionary narrative of John, those people would have suffered the ultimate consequences, and that is martyrdom, using martyrdom in our 21st century way that we use, someone who dies for their faith.

So, I doubt that John would have conceived of someone who refused to worship the beast and his image and refused the mark that that person would not have been slain or killed, or martyred because of their refusal to conform and to submit. So, I doubt that we should see two separate groups here. Instead, I think probably this image of those who refuse to worship the beast and those who refuse the mark on their forehead are those then who are slain and beheaded because of their testimony and faithful witness.

But probably, this group is meant simply to represent the entirety of God's people. This is, again, according to the book of Revelation, John perceives that anyone who maintains a faithful witness and refuses to follow the beast the end result is going to be suffering and death. So, I think that this is simply John's way of depicting the entirety of God's people, not necessarily suggesting every last one of them, as we know that's not the case, that every last one, but in John's context, historical context, and also in his visionary narrative, to maintain a faithful witness and to refuse to follow the beast results in martyrdom or death because of one's faithful witness.

So, I think verse 4 should be understood as representing one group of people, those on the throne, and then those who are beheaded because of their witness and refusal to follow the beast. That is a representation of the entire people of God now at the end of history, being vindicated because of their suffering. So, the beast then reigned and killed God's people, and now, as part of his judgment, concomitant to his judgment, is also the vindication of the saints, rendering a verdict, despite the verdict of Satan, and despite the verdict of the world, and the saints go back and read chapter 11, where the beast put the saints to death and the entire world gloated because this was a victory, and the saint's testimony appeared to be in vain, the saint's witness appeared to be futile, now they are vindicated.

Satan is locked away and shut up, so now the saints can be vindicated and shown that their witness and their suffering was not in vain because, as we've said, in an exact reversal to what happened in chapters 12 and 13, where Satan reigned and Satan put to death through the beasts, Satan put to death those who opposed him, the people of God who maintain their faithful witness, now in an exact reversal, the saints come to life, they receive life, and now they reign. The period of a thousand years has probably engendered more speculation and also more confusion and more debate and discussion than perhaps any other issue in the book of Revelation, and I'm going to show you why I think it's rather ironic that that's the case. But in chapter 20 of Revelation, verses 4 through 6, in disproportion to the brevity of these two verses in this section in relationship to the rest of the book, this section has almost emerged.

These three verses have almost emerged as the centerpiece of the entire book. And I want to talk a little bit about this thousand years, but this reference to a thousand year period, the coming to life and reigning of the saints, especially in the second part of verse 4, the end part of verse 4, that's the only place you find a reference to the saints coming to life and reigning for a thousand years. That's basically the only reference to the Millennium.

But this text by itself has created or been responsible for the creation of entire theological systems. It's been responsible for the creation of entire views of eschatology or end-time events. It's played a role in the confessional statements of our churches in various groups and in the doctrinal statements of our churches.

It also played a significant role in identifying theological approaches and hermeneutical approaches to interpreting the book of Revelation itself. So often, you'll have people say, do you interpret Revelation premillennially or from a non-millennial perspective or post-millennial perspective? We'll look at those views in just a moment. But the point is, these verses by themselves, these three short verses, seem to have emerged as a centerpiece of Revelation and are not only responsible for creating entire theological and eschatological systems of how we understand the end times but also responsible for labeling different approaches to how we read the entire book of Revelation based solely on these verses.

Now, what I want to focus on for just a moment is this mention of the thousand years. This mention of the thousand years is responsible for and has resulted throughout church history in the creation of eschatological systems, that is, the ways of looking at the end time. The Millennium, or this reference to a thousand years, has played a crucial role throughout church history and throughout our theological thinking about end times.

Three general approaches have emerged, and hopefully, I don't need to spend too much time on this, you're familiar with these approaches, and you can certainly read about them in numerous textbooks that introduce you to these different systems and ways of looking at the Millennium and looking at the end times. But three different views throughout the history of interpreting Revelation in the church and throughout the church's articulation of its beliefs about eschatology or end times have been labeled Premillennial, Postmillennial, or Amillennial. And these all come from this text.

Again, this is the only place in the Bible that you explicitly find references to a millennial reign or to a thousand-year reign. Nowhere else do you find that. That doesn't mean that the Bible doesn't refer to it anywhere else.

Many have found precursors to this in some Old Testament expectations of an earthly reign, an earthly kingdom, such as Daniel chapter 7 and elsewhere and sections of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Some have found references already in the Old Testament. Some have found references in, for example, 1 Corinthians 15, in some of Paul's discussions of Christ reigning until he subdues his enemies.

Then, he hands the kingdom over to the Father. There seems to be a progression and some have seen Paul in sort of nascent terms referring to what John now refers to in more detail here in the Millennium. But the point is, this is the only place in the Bible we find explicit reference to the Millennium.

Again, that doesn't mean it's nowhere else or that it's not important at all because this is the only place. But it's important to state at the outset that we get the notion of the Millennial Kingdom right here. Now, just very briefly, the three primary approaches to the Millennium, and by the way, there are probably subclassifications within these approaches that I don't want to go into a lot of detail on those.

So, these are not homogenous. That is, when we talk about premillennialism, that doesn't mean everyone looks at the Millennium in the exact same way. There can be subclassifications and subcategories that different views could fall into.

But first of all, the view known as premillennialism. Premillennialism suggests two things. Number one is that there will be a future millennial reign.

There is a future period of time that has not yet taken place that will, a future period of time where Christ will reign over the earth with his saints in fulfillment of Revelation 20. And second, and this is where the word pre comes in, the prefix pre, Jesus Christ, will come back before that event. So, we're anticipating the time when Jesus Christ returns in the future.

When he returns, he will set up his millennial reign on earth. So, that's known as premillennialism. Pre-Christ comes before the Millennium.

He is the one who sets up the millennial kingdom. The kingdom does not arrive until Christ comes at his second coming. So, all these plagues and bulls and things happen.

And then, finally, Christ returns. He judges chapter 19, and then he sets up his millennial kingdom on earth. So, the Millennium is solely in the future.

It has not taken place yet, and it will not take place until Christ first comes back. Now, there's variations within this. One that we've kind of referred to, an approach that interprets Revelation rather literally, often sees Revelation chapter 20, the Millennium, as the place where all of Israel's literal, physical, national promises get fulfilled.

So, all the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament of a Davidic king ruling on his throne over the nation, a rebuilt temple, and the Israelites being restored to their land. Many people see that, see the Millennium in chapter 20 as the place where that will occur. But not everyone thinks this way that's Premillennial.

The main point with Premillennialism is its future, and Christ comes back first to set it up and to inaugurate it. A second view is what is known as Postmillennialism. This view is not nearly as common as the first one, although there is a strong minority that still holds to it.

Basically, postmillennialism, like premillennialism, is the first view. Postmillennialism thinks that the Millennium is still the future and that it will occur on Earth. So, it agrees there is a future Millennium, a future reign that will take place on earth. However, where they differ is they think that the future Millennium on earth will be a result, just very basically, and maybe too simplistically, but they say it'll be a result of the church's mission, the church preaching, and spreading the gospel, and through the power of the Spirit, that will result eventually in sort of a golden era being inaugurated called the Millennium.

And then after the Millennium, after that reign on earth, after that golden era, then Christ will come back, hence postmillennialism. So, they agree the Millennium is in the future. Like the first view, premillennialism, the Millennium is a future period of time on earth where, as a result of the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Spirit, there will be a golden age where righteousness will reign supreme, but then Christ comes after that event at the end to then set up the new heavens and new earth.

So, hence Postmillennial. A third view that also has a little bit of variation in it, but a view known as amillennialism. Again, this is a very common approach, which has been common for centuries in the early church.

The word ah, unlike the other two prefixes, temporal, pre, and post, is a sort of a privative construction that means no or not. So, literally no millennium. In a sense, that's a misnomer because they're not saying there's no millennium at all.

They're saying there's no future physical earthly millennium. There's no specific period of time in the future. Instead, what amillennialism says is the entire church age is a millennium.

The period between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ, the whole period, is a millennium symbolized by the thousand years. And this is a time during which the saints reign with Christ from heaven. There's all kinds of New Testament texts that demonstrate that Christ has been raised to heaven and seated

in the heavenly, at the right hand of God, from which he rules over all creation, and that we reign with him.

Some suggest that the Millennium is what happens at the death of the saints. When we die and go to heaven, then we reign with Christ from heaven. But the point is the Millennium is not restricted to any one period of time, hence amillennialism.

Instead, the Millennium, the thousand years, symbolizes the entire sweep of the church age, the entire sweep of church history, where Christ rules from heaven and the saints rule with him. What is important to recall before I make a couple of observations related to the Millennium, what is important to recall is that Christians throughout church history have generally been tolerant of different views of the Millennium. It's interesting when you look at some of our early creedal statements in the early centuries of the church; they don't really have a millennial statement in them.

But the church has been tolerant of different views of the Millennium, and godly, intelligent Christians throughout the centuries have held all three of these views. And some have even changed their mind at times on different views. So the point is, there's never been an official position of the church, and there's never been an orthodox position. None of these three views have been the official position of the church that is orthodox.

Instead, church history has tolerated various approaches to the Millennium. And I think that should color the way we look at the Millennium today. I was raised in an environment where unless you held one of these views, your whole view of the Bible was held in suspicion, your ability to interpret the rest of the Bible was held in question, and your whole spirituality and relationship with Jesus Christ was held in suspicion.

I think church history, as well as some of the comments I want to make about this chapter, should remind us that if ever here, we need to approach the text in humility; if ever, we need to be tolerant of different views and different approaches. I do not say that to mean your view of the Millennium is not important, and it really doesn't matter, and this text doesn't matter, and you can kind of or should sort of sweep it under the rug and just ignore it. No, it's important to read this text; it's important to decide what you think about it and realize the implications of how you read the text.

But I think that what is more important than what position you hold is how you hold it and what you do with it. So before I state how I approach this text and how I look at it, I want to make a handful of observations that I think should guide whatever approach we take, and however we read it, I think should guide the way we interpret the text. First of all, is, I take it that the reference to a thousand years should be

understood symbolically, as we've seen all the other numbers and all the other time periods throughout the book of Revelation, whether it's three and a half years or 42 months or 1260 days or whatever, half an hour, an hour, and the number seven, the number 12, etc., etc.

I think we should take one thousand years in the same way we take other numbers and other references of the time periods as symbolic. In other words, the thousand years does not necessarily refer to a specific period of time that lasts for a long time. It could.

In other words, it could refer to almost any type of period of time. It could refer to a period of time of almost any length and duration. So the number thousand probably signifies, as we've seen, the number ten usually indicates fullness and completion.

So now you have ten times 100, a large number. What the thousand then, I think, signifies is a period of time that represents or the thousand represents fullness and completeness and could refer to a period of time of virtually any duration, whether short or very long. But I doubt that John intends for us to take this as a reference to a literal period of one thousand years of 360 days.

Instead, the importance of this is the symbolic value of one thousand. It's a large round number indicating fullness and completion that could refer to a period of time of virtually any duration. Second is, but this is disputed, but I would suggest that, in my view, this is an important principle that goes back to our discussion of chapter 19, verse 11.

I think we need to read chapter 20, this reference to the thousand-year reign; however, we understand it, we need to read it as referring to what happens at the second coming of Christ. That is, chapter 19, verses 11 all the way to the end of chapter 20, and into chapter 21 in verse 8, comprises a series of images or scenes that refer to what happens at the second coming of Christ. So, in chapter 19, verse 11, I think, with the heavens being open, we introduce a new scene, and therefore, I think that chapter 20, the entirety of chapter 20, and this reference to the thousand-year reign must be seen in the context of this broader series of images that are different scenes or different ways of interpreting the meaning and significance of the second coming of Christ.

So whatever we make of this thousand years, it seems to me that it is to be associated with it, and it happens at the coming of Christ, starting with chapter 11. Now, one of the big issues is: how do we relate chapters 19 and 20? Revelation 19 is the final judgment scene, the rider and the white horse in verses 11 through 21. How do we relate that chronologically to chapter 20? A very key feature of this in some, or a key assumption, I should say, a key assumption in some millennial schemes, is that the events of chapter 20 have to happen after chapter 19.

That may indeed be true, but again, we have to demonstrate that. We can't simply assume that because, as I've suggested, I don't think, and we've seen this elsewhere in Revelation, John does not always present things in a way that indicates their chronological order. Instead, he's more interested in giving us the sequence in which he saw the things.

So sometimes John can refer to the same event or the same time period but look at it from different perspectives. So, chapters 19 and 20 may follow each other and may relate chronologically, but it's possible that chapter 20 could be another way of looking at the same event as chapter 19, but from a different perspective. But in any case, I want to make it clear that I'm proceeding with the assumption that I think I find in the text that starting at chapter 19, verse 11, everything through chapter 21 and verse 8 refers to what happens at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The third thing then I've actually already mentioned, related to point two, and I already got into that, but that is that chapters 19 and 20 should not necessarily be taken as a series of chronological sequence of events. So the rider and the white horse coming to judge may not necessarily happen first, and then Satan's bound, and then after he's bound, then the millennial reign, and then after the millennial reign, Satan's released in the final battle, and then after that takes place, the great white throne judgment. That's possible, but we can't assume that John is presenting the exact chronological order in which these events may take place.

I've already said that it's possible he's looking at, and I would argue it's more likely he's exploring the meaning and significance of what happens when Christ returns by using different images and scenes to describe roughly the same events or the same time period, what happens when Christ returns. The last thing I want to say, the last observation I want to say, is that this is, as we've already noted, the only place in the New Testament where you find the reference to the thousand-year reign. I don't want to make a whole lot out of that because, for example, we don't find the word trinity used in the Old New Testament, but that doesn't mean it's not important, and it hasn't been important for the church.

So, I don't want to say that because we don't find the explicit wording of one thousand-year reign or millennial reign, Millennium is not a Greek word. Millennium is the Latin word for one thousand years, and we've brought that then over into English, but because we don't find the reference to a thousand-year earthly reign elsewhere in Revelation, it does not mean that it is not important. But it is interesting that when I read the text of Revelation 20 and verses 4 and 6, the reference to the Millennium is rather cryptic. In other words, it really does not tell us what happens except that the saints come to life and reign.



That's all that it says. It doesn't tell us who they reign over, and maybe that's not the point. Maybe the point, again, is simply that they reign in contrast to the beast and Satan who reigns.

It does not explicitly even say where they are when they reign. It doesn't say whether they reign from heaven or earth. I mean, look at the text.

It simply doesn't say. Now, the assumption seems to be that in light of the emphasis on Revelation that the kingdom of the world must become the kingdom of our God and Savior, the assumption would seem to be, and the fact that Satan ruled over the saints on earth, the assumption seems to be, I think a valid one perhaps, is this reign takes place on earth. But it's interesting that John doesn't clearly say that.

Also, in chapters 1 and 5, we find references to the saints who are reigning forever and ever, which this now seems to fulfill. But intriguingly, it just says very little about where the saints are, who they reign over. It doesn't tell us anything else that happens during this thousand year period.

Is this a time when Israel's promises are fulfilled, or is this a time when there is a lengthy reign where Christ comes and sets the political, economic, and religious system all in order? The text doesn't tell us that. I find it interesting that it's rather cryptic and unclear as to some of these questions we have. Instead, I think when you read the text, one of the reasons why this is so brief is because this is merely a prelude.

Well, first of all, because I think the main point is that chapter 20 is about the judgment of Satan, not primarily about the millennial kingdom. But second, I think the reason why this is so short is coming to life and reigning here is a prelude to Revelation 21 and 22. When you read 21 and 22, this is where all the fireworks go off.

This is where the full disclosure of the reward of the saints, the vindication of the saints, the reign of the saints, chapter 22, verse 5, ends with the saints reigning forever and ever. I think chapter 20 is simply an anticipation and a preparation for that. So chapter 21 and 22, this is where all the fireworks take place.

It's as if this is the climax. This is what we've been waiting for, not chapter 20, the Millennium. It's 21 and 22.

And interestingly too, in response to those that would say, well, the Millennium is necessary because that's where all the physical promises in the Old Testament get fulfilled. The problem is all the texts, all the Old Testament texts that refer to the promises in the Old Testament now occur in Revelation 21 and 22, as we'll see. So, the main goal of the book is not Revelation 20; it's 21 and 22.

And so, I think that our interpretation should reflect Revelation's own emphasis. Our interpretation of the book of Revelation and our interpretation of chapter 20 should reflect Revelation's own emphasis that chapter 20, the Millennium, actually tells us very little. I'm going to suggest why and how that influences the way we interpret this, but our focus should not be on that. But our focus should be on chapters 21 and 22 because this is where the climax of God's intention for history, the climax of God's vindication and reward for his people, the climax of God's redemptive history is finally reached, not in chapter 20, but in 21 and 22.

And so, our understanding of and our interpretation of the Millennium in Revelation 20 should reflect that. So in the next section, then I want to, based on some of these observations, I want to suggest how I read chapter 20 and what I think it's doing as far as its meaning and as far as how it functions within the context of chapter 20, but also within the context of the book as a whole.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 26 on Revelation 20, The Binding of Satan and the Introduction to the Millennium.