

Dr. David L. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 27, Revelation 20: Millennium; Great White Throne Judgment

6-Min. Video Overview

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Today, we are jumping into one of the most talked about, debated, and frankly, fascinating parts of the entire Bible. I'm talking about the 1,000 year reign in the book of Revelation. It is just packed with some really powerful, and let's be honest, sometimes pretty confusing imagery.

So what is the deal with this millennium? You've got Satan being bound, you have resurrected saints reigning alongside Christ, and the whole thing ends with this massive final battle. It's a lot to wrap your head around, but today we're going to unpack a really compelling interpretation from one scholar that helps make sense of it all. You know, the best way to look at this is kind of like a giant puzzle.

So for this explainer, we're going to follow the work of Dr. Dave Mathewson. We'll see how he takes all these pieces that seem to be all over the place — the numbers, the resurrections, the judgments — and fits them together into one really powerful picture. Okay, so with any puzzle, you need the right tools, right? You need a strategy.

Well, Dr. Mathewson says that to really unlock what's going on in Revelation 20, we need what he calls an interpreter's key, basically a set of principles for how to read the super-symbolic language of this book. And here they are, the four principles that make up our key. First up, the number a thousand is symbolic.

It's about the quality of the rain, not a literal quantity of years. Second, this whole thing is happening at the very end of history. Third, and this one is so important, we shouldn't read this like a simple timeline.

Think of it more like different camera angles on the same final epic event. And last, the millennium isn't the final destination. It's the setup for the true climax, the new creation.

All right, we've got our key, so let's use it to unlock the main symbol of this whole passage, the thousand years themselves. If it's not a literal block of time, then what on earth does it represent? Well, in this interpretation, the number's whole job is to be symbolic. It's meant to show the complete, the total, the absolute victory of God's people.

It's a massive symbol of their vindication, a complete reversal of all the suffering and persecution they went through. And this is where it gets really brilliant. You see, the text does this on purpose.

It puts the periods of persecution right up against the period of reward. The suffering is described with these small, limited numbers: 10 days, 42 months, 3.5 years, but their reign,

the reward, gets this huge, expansive number at 1000 years. This quote from Dr. Mathewson just nails it.

The whole point of using these numbers is to show that the reign of evil is just a blip compared to the reward. The compensation for their faithfulness, as he says, far exceeds anything they had to suffer. It's this incredible statement of ultimate justice.

Okay, let's move on to the next piece of this puzzle. This is the part that can get really confusing for people. All this talk about a first resurrection and a second death.

So how did that fit into this big picture of vindication? This chart really helps break it down. So the saints, they experienced the first death, which is physical death, right? Often from persecution, but their reward is the first resurrection. That's their vindication, their entry into eternal life.

Now their opponents, on the other hand, they get a second resurrection, but it's only to face judgment, which the text calls the second death, the lake of fire, a symbol of final, absolute separation from God. So here's the bottom line. There's this incredible promise just baked right into the text.

Those who are faithful, even if it means suffering physical death- that first death- are totally and completely spared from the second death. Taking part in the first resurrection is their guarantee of eternal security. Okay, so we've got the thousand years as this huge symbol of vindication, and we've sorted out the two different fates.

Now that those pieces are in place, the grand finale of the whole story starts to come into much sharper focus. Hey, remember that third principle we talked about, that this isn't a strict timeline? Well, this is where that idea really pays off. See, Matheson argues that all those different battles and judgment scenes- the Deist falling, Armageddon, Gog and Magog- aren't a sequence of separate wars. No, think of them as different ways of describing one single final all-out removal of evil from all of creation.

And just look at how thorough this final judgment is. I mean, the text just systematically gets rid of every single source of opposition: the beast and the false prophet, gone; the powers on earth that followed them, gone; Satan himself, the dragon, the source of it all, gone. Then the unbelieving dead are judged.

And finally, the old creation itself, the very stage where evil played out, is removed. But here's the thing: this total house cleaning, this complete wipeout of everything evil and corrupt, that's not actually the end of the story. It's the preparation.

It's what has to happen to clear the stage for the real star of the show. And this is it. This is the goal.

The entire book, maybe the entire Bible, has been building towards. It's not a temporary rain on a broken earth. It's the arrival of the new creation, a restored heaven and earth where God lives right there with his people forever.

That is the ultimate climax. So if Revelation 20 isn't really a detailed timeline of the future, then what's its message for you and me today? Well, I think it's a message of profound

hope. It's a guarantee that no matter how bad things might look, suffering is temporary, justice is coming, and the ultimate vindication for those who are faithful is more glorious than we can possibly imagine.

And that right there is something to hold on to.