

Revelation 20: The Binding of Satan and the Introduction to the Millennium

Author: Dr. Dave Mathewson | **Session 26**

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Abstract

In Session 26 of his course on Revelation, Dr. Dave Mathewson analyzes Revelation 20 within the broader contextual framework of Christ's second coming spanning Revelation 19:11 through 21:8. He demonstrates that the chapter functions primarily as a series of divine judgment scenes—highlighting the two-stage deposition of Satan and the full vindication of faithful saints—rather than a strict chronological timeline of end-time events. Examining the symbolic thousand-year reign (the Millennium) and three major church-historical interpretations, Mathewson advocates for hermeneutical humility and positions chapter 20 as a cryptic prelude to the ultimate climax of redemptive history in the New Jerusalem of chapters 21 and 22.

Outline

I. Introduction to Revelation 20 and Contextual Framework

- A. Overview of Revelation 20 as the most widely recognized chapter in the book
 - 1. Popular associations with the thousand-year reign (Millennium)
 - 2. Purpose of the lecture: analyzing the chapter as a whole and its function within Revelation
- B. Broad Literary Context: Revelation 19:11–21:8
 - 1. Paired contrast between Babylon/Rome (ch. 17–18, 19:1–10) and New Jerusalem (21:9–22:5)
 - 2. Central section (19:11–21:8) portrays and interprets the Second Coming of Christ at the end of history
- C. Nature of Visionary Sequence vs. Chronological Sequence
 - 1. Introductory phrase "Then I saw" indicates John's visionary sequence, not chronological occurrence
 - 2. Events from 19:11 through 20:15 convey diverse perspectives describing the same overarching return of Christ

II. Structure and Three Main Scenes of Revelation 20

- A. Focus on Divine Judgment and Deposition of Evil
 - 1. Chapter 19 judges and removes the two beasts (the Beast and the False Prophet)

2. Chapter 20 focuses on the judgment and removal of the Dragon (Satan), mirroring their order of introduction in chapters 12–13

B. Scene 1: The Binding of Satan in the Abyss (Revelation 20:1–3)

1. An angel with the key to the abyss and a great chain binds Satan for 1,000 years
2. Satan is sealed to prevent him from deceiving the nations during this period

C. Scene 2: The Resurrection and Reign of the Saints (Revelation 20:4–10)

1. Faithful martyrs come to life and reign with Christ for 1,000 years
2. Release of Satan, final deception of Gog and Magog, war, and Satan's ultimate destruction in the lake of burning sulfur

D. Scene 3: The Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11–15)

1. Earth and sky flee from God's presence; books of deeds and the Book of Life are opened
2. Universal judgment of the dead; death and Hades cast into the lake of fire (the second death)

III. Exegetical Analysis: Scene 1 — The Binding of Satan (Rev 20:1–3)

A. Identification of the Dragon

1. Direct link to Revelation 12:9: ancient serpent, devil, Satan
2. Symbol of chaos, evil, and Old Testament sea monsters

B. Two-Stage Judgment of Satan

1. Stage 1: Bound and locked in the abyss (pit) for a thousand years
2. Stage 2: Released briefly before final consignment to the lake of fire

C. Background in Old Testament and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature

1. Isaiah 24:21–22 ("Little Apocalypse"): powers bound in prison and punished after many days
2. 1 Enoch 10:4–6: binding of Azazel hand and foot in darkness/pit awaiting great day of judgment
3. 2 Enoch 7:1–2: angelic prisoners held under guard waiting for measureless judgment
4. 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6: fallen angels held in gloomy dungeons awaiting final judgment

D. Theological Implications

1. Absence of dualism: a single angel easily binds Satan under God's supreme sovereignty
2. Connection to Jesus' earthly ministry: Matthew 12:29 (binding the strong man) and Luke 10:18 (Satan falling)
3. First coming inaugurated Satan's binding; second coming consummates his total binding and judgment

IV. Exegetical Analysis: Scene 2 — The Vindication of the Saints (Rev 20:4–10)

A. The Heavenly Thrones and Seated Rulers (v. 4a)

1. Recall of divine sovereignty and kingship motifs from Revelation 4–5
2. Identity of throne occupants: overcomers (Rev 3:21) vindicated by judgment rendered on their behalf (Daniel 7:22)

B. Identity of the Reigning Souls (v. 4b–6)

1. Connection to Rev 6:9–11 (souls under the altar), Rev 12 (faithful witness), and Rev 13 (refusal of beast's mark)
2. Complete reversal of earthly status: Satan and beasts ruled and killed saints; now Satan is bound while saints come to life and reign
3. Representation: faithful martyrs represent the entire faithful people of God maintaining steadfast witness

C. The First Resurrection and Second Death

1. Those in the first resurrection are holy and blessed; second death (lake of fire) has no power over them
2. Priestly and royal status: reigning with Christ throughout the thousand years

V. Theological Approaches to the Millennium (Rev 20:4–6)

A. Historical Disproportion and Significance

1. Three short verses (20:4–6) have historically become a centerpiece for major theological systems
2. Sole explicit mention of a 1,000-year reign in the entire Bible

B. Three Major Eschatological Systems

1. Premillennialism: Christ's Second Coming precedes a literal/future earthly millennial reign
 - a. Classic/Historical Premillennialism vs. Dispensational Premillennialism (national promises to Israel)
2. Postmillennialism: Gospel preaching and spiritual renewal usher in a golden age, after which Christ returns
3. Amillennialism: The 1,000 years symbolize the entire current church age between Christ's first and second comings

C. Call for Hermeneutical Humility and Charity

1. Absence of official millennial dogmas in early ecumenical creeds
2. History of diversity among godly theologians across all three views

VI. Key Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting the Millennium

A. Symbolic Nature of "1,000 Years"

1. Consistent with symbolic numbers in Revelation (3.5 years, 42 months, 1260 days, 7, 12)
2. 1,000 (10^3) symbolizes divine fullness, completeness, and a period of sovereignly determined duration

B. Orientation to the Second Coming (19:11–21:8)

1. Non-linear, non-chronological recap: chapter 20 offers a distinct theological perspective on the return of Christ

C. Cryptic Nature and Function as Prelude

1. Text omits operational details (who saints reign over, exact location)
2. Millennium functions as a prelude/anticipation to the ultimate climax in Revelation 21–22 (New Jerusalem and eternal reign)