

## Revelation 20:1-6 (The millennium!)

### I. The Millennium: first glance

- Before considering what this time period means, it is worth reflecting on what is promised.
- The old “satanic trinity” has been reduced to one: the dragon, the devil, and Satan (all descriptions of the same being).
- Devil (diabolos): prone to slander, make accusations, a divider.
- Satan (Satanos): an accuser
- These are classic descriptions of primal evil as it is depicted throughout scripture, all the way back to the garden.
- The beast(s) who have been destroyed are like lower level forms of evil, the serpent is evil itself.
- This general promise of the total annihilation of evil is couched in confusing imagery that is prone to misunderstanding.
- Why would the serpent be released again after 1,000 years? Why are those who were beheaded (like the Apostle Paul) given special status in the millennium?

### II. Millennial Expectations in Jewish – mostly second Temple – apocalyptic literature

- During the Babylonian exile, God’s people began to hope in the restoration of a Davidic kingdom under the Messiah. As we see in NT history, many expected a literal, earthly kingdom in the form of a government.
- At the same time, there Jews who took a more pessimistic view of history, and imagined God’s final judgment over evil without the restoration of a Davidic kingdom. See Isaiah 24-27; Daniel; or other second Temple literature such as *The Assumption of Moses* and *Apocalypse of Abraham*.
- Some understand John’s confusing description of the millennium as a reconciliation of two irreconcilable Jewish apocalyptic expectations.
- Should we expect both a restoration of an earthly kingdom, and a final judgment over evil?
- Some have suggested that John’s millenium is an example of Greco-Roman thought infiltrating Christianity, in the form of the “Golden Age” that so much Pagan literature anticipates.
- Rev 20 is not the only example of an attempt to reconcile these two Jewish expectations. See the “Apocalypse of Weeks (3rd century bc)” in 1 Enoch 91: the prophecy anticipates a series of ten “weeks” marking the end times, where the 8th is the time when the righteous rule the earth, the 9th is a time of destruction, and the 10th is the judgment of the angels.
- In *4 Ezra* (100 AD), God brings evil to an end, and the Messiah reigns for 400 years alongside the righteous on earth. Then comes the resurrection and judgment of the dead.

- 2 *Baruch* 29-30 anticipates that the souls of the righteous will be raised first before everyone else.
- *The Ascension of Isaiah* (around 100 AD) prophecies that Beliar will reign as the Antichrist for 1,332 days, the Lord will come and throw him into Gehenna, there will be a period of rest in this world, and then the righteous will be taken to heaven.
- **In the NT:** 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 offers this sequence: Jesus is raised, those who belong to Christ are raised and reign with him until every enemy is put under his feet, the final judgment of every rule, power, and authority.

### III. What does this mean?

- **No two apocalyptic works agree about time**, suggesting that the authors themselves (including John) were not describing the presence of literal kingdoms with exact timelines.
- In “the expectation of a first divine intervention to establish a kingdom or ideal time in this world and of a second divine intervention to replace the temporal world by the eternal, we can see the two interventions simply as symbolic ways of predicting divine victory over evil forces that are an obstacle to God’s kingdom or rule over the whole world.” Rev 20 “does not describe a historical kingdom, but...that eschatological expectations will be fulfilled.” Raymond Brown

### IV. Perspectives in Church history

In spite of the fact that only one passage and two verses reference the millennium, it is one of the most widely discussed portions of Rev.

- Papias, Justin, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Lactantius (all orthodox) and Cerinthus and Montanus (both heretics), all anticipated a literal thousand year reign. In reaction to the sensual, worldly interpretations of this reign the Chiliastic movement rejected this interpretation (their interpretations were deemed heretical in the 5th century).
- Origen believed the millennium represented the spiritual kingdom of God on earth now; Augustine believed that the first resurrection is about personal conversion while the second pertains to judgment.
- **Joachim of Flora (1130-1202):** A cistercian monk predicted that the millennium would begin in 1240 with a new era of the spirit.
- **Radical Reformation:** Groups spawned by the Reformations (Zwickau prophets, Muentzer, etc.), anticipated the beginning of the millennium in their time.
- **In North America:** In part because of the “radical” heritage in American Christianity, the millenium has played an outsized role. See 7th day adventists, Jehovah’s witnesses, Mormons, evangelicalism, dispensationalism.

**“It is not for you to know times and seasons that have been set by the Father’s own authority.” Acts 1:7**

## The Rest of Revelation 20 (resurrection!)

### I. The great battle (again)

- At the conclusion of the thousand years, Satan is let loose to gather Gog and Magog for another final battle.
- The word of the LORD came to me: Mortal, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophesy against him and say: Thus says the Lord GOD: I am against you, O Gog...Ezekiel 38.
- Gog of Magog is the name of the King who leads the forces against Israel in Ezekiel 38 and 39, and likely refers to King Gyges, a 7th century BC Lydian King. At the conclusion of the battle, Ezekiel prophesies a new heaven and new earth.
- The fact that one King, Gog of Magog, has become two people, Gog and Magog, is indicative of symbolic flexibility in apocalyptic literature.
- The satanic trinity is reunited when the serpent is cast down into the lake of fire.

### II. The judgment of the dead

- In classic biblical form, John describes the anticipated resurrection of all the dead, followed by a judgment. (He shall judge the quick and the dead)
- I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. Job 19
- Death and Hades/Hell give up the dead? Here we see one instance of the complexity of how scripture describes judgment after death. Rev suggests that Hell is emptied for the final judgment, but then what?

### III. The judgment of death

- Judgment is not limited to the dead, but includes death itself.
- “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well aged wines stained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all people, the covering that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever.” Isaiah 25
- The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 1 Cor. 15:26

Death be not proud, by John Donne

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.  
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally  
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.