

## Lesson 33 Rev 20:1-6

### Revelation 20:1-6 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

<sup>2</sup> And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

<sup>3</sup> and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

<sup>4</sup> Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

<sup>5</sup> The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

### N. The millennial reign of Christ (20:1-10)

This chapter presents the fact that Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years. If this chapter is taken literally, it is relatively simple to understand what is meant. However, because many Bible interpreters have rejected the idea that there will be a reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years after His second coming, this chapter has been given an unusually large number of diverse interpretations, all designed to eliminate a literal millennial reign. In general there are three viewpoints, each with a number of variations.

The most recent view is what is known as *postmillennialism*. According to this view the thousand years represent the triumph of the gospel in the period leading up to the second coming of Christ. The return of Christ will follow the Millennium. Usually traced to Daniel Whitby, a controversial writer of the 17th century, this view has been advanced by other prominent scholars in the history of the church including Charles Hodge, A.H. Strong, David Brown, and more recently, Loraine Boettner. Basically it is an optimistic view that Christ will reign spiritually on earth through the work of the church and the preaching of the gospel. This view has largely been discarded in the 20th century, because many anti-Christian movements have prospered and the world has not progressed spiritually.

A second major view is *amillennialism*, which denies that there is any literal Millennium or reign of Christ on earth. The millennial reign of Christ is reduced to a spiritual reign in the hearts of believers. This reign is either over those on earth who put their trust in Him or over those in heaven. Both the amillennial and postmillennial views must interpret Revelation 20 in a nonliteral sense. Often there is wide difference among amillennarians in their interpretations of various passages in the Book of Revelation. Amillennialism historically had its first important

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advocate in Augustine who lived in the 4th and 5th centuries. Before Augustine, it is difficult to find one orthodox amillenarian. Modern advocates include such respected 20th-century theologians as Oswald Allis, Louis Berkhof, William Hendriksen, Abraham Kuyper, R.C.H. Lenski, and Gerhardus Vos.

A third form of interpretation is *premillennialism*, so named because it interprets [Revelation 20](#) as referring to a literal thousand-year reign of Christ following His second coming. As the Second Coming occurs *before the Millennium*, it is therefore *premillennial*. Twentieth-century advocates of this position include Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles L. Feinberg, A.C. Gaebelein, H.A. Ironside, Alva McClain, William Pettingill, Charles C. Ryrie, C.I. Scofield, Wilbur Smith, and Merrill F. Unger. Other premillenarians can be found from the first century on, including Papias, Justin Martyr, and many other early church fathers. Arguments for this position are based on the natural sequence of events in [chapter 20](#) following [chapter 19](#), viewing them as sequential and as stemming from the second coming of Christ. Many passages speak of the second coming of Christ being followed by a reign of righteousness on earth ([Pss. 2; 24; 72; 96; Isa. 2; 9:6-7; 11-12; 63:1-6; 65-66; Jer. 23:5-6; 30:8-11; Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-8; Zeph. 3:14-20; Zech. 8:1-8; 14:1-9; Matt. 19:28; 25:31-46; Acts 15:16-18; Rom. 11:25-27; Jude 14-15; Rev. 2:25-28; 19:11-20:6](#)).

List  
happening

It should be evident that one's interpretation of [Revelation 20](#) is an important decision that serves as a watershed for various approaches to prophetic Scripture. The approach taken in this commentary is that the events in [chapter 20](#) follow chronologically the events in [chapter 19](#). Many also believe that [chapters 21-22](#) follow in chronological order (for more detailed discussion of various views, see Walvoord's *Revelation*, pp. 282-90; and *The Millennial Kingdom*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959, pp. 263-75).

## 1. THE BINDING OF SATAN ([20:1-3](#))

[20:1-3](#). [Chapter 20](#) begins with the familiar phrase, **And I saw an angel** (cf. [7:2](#); [8:2](#); [10:1](#); [14:6](#); [18:1](#); [19:17](#)). The "and" with which this chapter begins suggests that it continues the sequence of events begun in [19:1](#), which is introduced with the words "after this." In [chapter 19](#) the Greek has "and" at the beginnings of 15 verses (but it is omitted in the NIV in [vv. 4, 8, 10-11, 13-16, and 21](#) and is trans. "then" in [vv. 5-6, 9, and 19](#) and "but" in [v. 20](#)). The use of the word "and" (*kai*) often indicates action that follows in logical and/or chronological sequence. Accordingly there is no reason why [chapter 20](#) should not be considered as describing events which follow [chapter 19](#). "And" (*kai*) continues throughout [chapter 20](#), beginning each verse except [verse 5](#). There is thus no linguistic or grammatical suggestion that these events are anything other than events following the second coming of Christ and occurring in sequence.

In addition to the grammar which connects these incidents, there is also the causal connection of the events which follow naturally from the fact that Christ will have returned to the earth. In [chapter 19](#) these events include casting the beast and the false prophet into the lake of burning sulfur and destroying their armies. Having disposed of the world ruler and the false prophet as well as the armies, it would be only natural that Christ should then turn to Satan himself, as He does in [chapter 20](#).

Accordingly John saw an angel descend from heaven holding the key to the Abyss and a great chain. The angel grabbed Satan, the dragon (cf. [12:3-4](#), [7](#), [9](#), [13](#), [16-17](#); [13:2](#), [4](#), [11](#); [16:13](#)), that ancient serpent ([12:9](#), [14-15](#)), bound him, and threw him into the Abyss, and locked it, in order to prevent Satan's work of deceiving the nations any more for a thousand years.

An important interpretive question is whether Satan was bound at the first coming of Christ, as is commonly advanced by amillenarians, or will be bound at His second coming, as is held by premillenarians. [Revelation 20:1-3](#) rather clearly contradicts the amillennial interpretation that Satan was bound at the first coming of Christ. Throughout the Scriptures Satan is said to exert great power not only against the world but also against Christians ([Acts 5:3](#); [1 Cor. 5:5](#); [7:5](#); [2 Cor. 2:11](#); [11:14](#); [12:7](#); [1 Tim. 1:20](#)). If there is still any question whether this is so, it should be settled by the exhortation of [1 Peter 5:8](#): "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

Amillenarians answer this by saying that Satan is limited by the power of God. But this has always been true, as illustrated in the Book of Job and elsewhere. To describe Satan's present situation as being locked in the Abyss and unable to deceive the nations for a period of a thousand years is simply not factually true today, and it requires extreme spiritualization of the literalness of this passage as well as other New Testament references to Satan's activities and present power. This same power of Satan is further revealed in the Great Tribulation when he empowers the world ruler ([Rev. 13:4](#)). Satan will have been cast out of heaven at the beginning of the Great Tribulation and will then be more active than ever ([Rev. 12:9](#), [13](#), [15](#), [17](#)).

If Satan is actually deceiving the nations today, as the Scriptures and the facts of history indicate, then he is not now locked in the Abyss, and the thousand-year Millennium is still future. This interpretation is also supported by the final statement that after the thousand years, **he must be set free for a short time** ([20:3](#)). Here expositors again are at a loss to explain this except in a literal way, making possible a final satanic rebellion at the end of the millennial kingdom.

## 2. THE RESURRECTION AND REWARD OF THE MARTYRS ([20:4-6](#))

[20:4](#). Next in the series of revelations John recorded that he **saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge**. In addition he **saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their** standing true to the Lord and His **Word** in the Great Tribulation. The fact that John could see them implies that they had received intermediate bodies in heaven and were awaiting their resurrections.

A distinction should be made between what John saw and what he received as revelation. Though he could see the souls, he was informed that they had been beheaded because they had refused to worship **the beast or his image** and would not receive **his mark**. What John saw was not all the souls in heaven but a particular generation of martyred dead who had been contemporaneous with the world ruler, the beast out of the sea ([13:1](#)). If the church were raptured prior to this event, as premillenarians teach, it would make sense to single out these martyred dead for resurrection. But if the church were not raptured, it would be most unusual to ignore all the martyrs of preceding generations, the church as a whole, and to specify this relatively small group.

John apparently was not told the identity of the individuals seated on the thrones. They evidently do not include the martyred dead themselves. Christ had predicted ([Luke 22:29-30](#)) that the 12 disciples would "eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel." As the disciples are also a part of the church, the body of Christ, it would be natural for them to sit on these thrones.

According to the Scriptures a series of judgments is related to Christ's return. The beast and the false prophet will be cast into the fiery lake ([Rev. 19:20](#)), Satan will be cast into the Abyss ([20:1-3](#)), and then the martyred dead of the Great Tribulation will be judged and rewarded ([v. 4](#)). In addition, Israel will be judged ([Ezek. 20:33-38](#)), and the Gentiles will be judged ([Matt. 25:31-46](#)). These judgments precede and lead up to the millennial kingdom.

John stated that these martyred dead **came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years**. Their coming to life suggests that they will be given resurrected bodies. In addition to receiving the visual revelation, John was informed as to the meaning and character of the judgment that was here taking place.

**[20:5](#)**. John was also informed that **the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended**. This refers to the resurrection of the wicked dead, discussed later ([vv. 11-15](#)).

John stated that what he was seeing **is the first resurrection**. Posttribulationists refer to this as proof that the church will not be raptured before the Tribulation and that no resurrection has taken place prior to this point in fulfillment of God's prophetic program. It should be obvious, however, that in no sense could this be the number-one resurrection chronologically because historically Christ was the first to rise from the dead with a transformed, resurrected body. There was also the resurrection "of many" ([Matt. 27:52-53](#)) which took place when Christ died. In what sense then can this resurrection in [Revelation 20:5](#) be "first"?

As the context which follows indicates, "the first resurrection" ([vv. 5-6](#)) contrasts with the last resurrection ([vv. 12-13](#)), which is followed by "the second death" ([vv. 6, 14](#)). It is first in the sense of *before*. All the righteous, regardless of when they are raised, take part in the resurrection which is first or before the final resurrection (of the wicked dead) at the end of the Millennium. This supports the conclusion that the resurrection of the righteous is by stages. Christ was "the Firstfruits" ([1 Cor. 15:23](#)), which was preceded by the token resurrection of a number of saints ([Matt. 27:52-53](#)). Then will occur the Rapture of the church, which will include the resurrection of dead church saints and the translation of living church saints ([1 Thes. 4:13-18](#)). The resurrection of the two witnesses will occur in the Great Tribulation ([Rev. 11:3, 11](#)). Then the resurrection of the martyred dead of the Great Tribulation will occur soon after Christ returns to earth ([20:4-5](#)). To these may be added the resurrection of Old Testament saints which apparently will also occur at this time, though it is not mentioned in this text (cf. [Isa. 26:19-21](#); [Ezek. 37:12-14](#); [Dan. 12:2-3](#)).

**[20:6](#)**. All those who share in the resurrection of the righteous are said to be **blessed and holy, and 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**. While all the righteous will be raised before the Millennium, individuals will retain their identities and their group identifications such as Gentile

believers and believers in Israel in the Old Testament, the church of the New Testament, and saints of the Tribulation.

It should be noted that the term "a thousand years" occurs six times in [chapter 20](#). This was not something that could be seen visually; John had to be informed of it and the vision had to be interpreted as relating to a period of a thousand years. While amillenarians and others have tended to view this as nonliteral, there is no evidence to support this conclusion. This is the only chapter in Revelation where a period of a thousand years is mentioned, and the fact that it is mentioned six times and is clearly described as a period of time before which and after which events take place lead to the conclusion that it means a literal thousand-year period.

Since other time designations in Revelation are literal (e.g., "42 months," [11:2](#); [13:5](#); "1,260 days," [11:3](#); [12:6](#)) it is natural to take "a thousand years" literally also. If the term "a thousand years" designates a nonspecific but long period of time, the present Age between Christ's two advents, as amillenarians hold, then one would expect John to say simply that Christ would reign "a long time," in contrast to the "short time" of Satan's release ([20:3](#)).

Events which precede the thousand years are (a) the second coming of Christ, (b) the beast and the false prophet thrown into the fiery lake, (c) the armies destroyed, (d) Satan bound and locked in the Abyss, (e) thrones of judgment introduced, and (f) the martyred dead of the Tribulation resurrected. These events revealed in their proper sequence make it clear that the thousand-year period follows all these events, including the second coming of Christ. The conclusion that the Second Coming is premillennial is clearly supported by a normal, literal interpretation of this text.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

### **Open it**

1. Why do you think our society is growing more and more preoccupied with Satan and the occult?

**Satan's influence is spreading around the world**

2. What is your general attitude about politics?

**They are like diapers, full of poo and should be changed often**

### **Explore it**

3. What did John see an angel carrying? ([20:1](#))

**holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.**

4. By what assorted names did John call the dragon? ([20:2](#))

**The serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan**

5. Where did the angel throw the dragon? ([20:3](#))

**Through him into the abyss and shut it and sealed it over him, so he would not deceive the nation any longer**

6. For how long was the dragon locked up? ([20:3](#))

**1000 years**

7. Why had some believers died? ([20:4](#))

**And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand;**

8. What happened to the martyrs as John watched? ([20:4](#))

**They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years**

9. When would the rest of the dead be resurrected? ([20:5](#))

**The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.**

10. In what way are the people raised in the first resurrection blessed? ([20:6](#))

**<sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.**

**Get it**

11. When do you think Christ's reign is—after He takes us to heaven, before He takes us to heaven, or now? Why?

**After, because the bible says, Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.**

12. What do you think is the point of God binding Satan and then releasing him?

**God lets man do his own work for that time and Satan isn't influence him. In the end times he is brought to his knees by Christ and put away in the**

13. In what ways does Satan appear to be unbound?

**At this time, he can still go where ever he wants to, to accuse us before God, and send his demons to work with him, against us**

14. In what ways do God's people already reign with Christ?

**We have his authority and power, but most don't know how to receive it and use it.**

**Apply it**

15. In what ways can you give testimony of God's Word to the people you know?

**By talking with them and steering them to the bible**

16. In what concrete ways this week can you resist Satan's attempts to rule in your life?

**We cannot resist Satan without Christ in our lives, satan know how to work around our thoughts to make us NOT believe what we should know it concrete fact, WE ARE GODS CHILDERN!**