

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM  
IN  
REVELATION 20:1-6  
BY  
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TO FULFILL THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR  
REVELATION  
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## **How Long is 1,000 Years and When Will the Millennium Begin?**

The question that introduces this paper seems at first glance almost ridiculous. However in all actuality it is very important and has, over the centuries, been one of the dividing points between the three eschatological positions of pre-millennialism, post-millennialism and amillennialism. How long is 1,000 years and when does this “period” begin in human history? This is the first question that this paper will address. The second topic that this paper will attempt to detail is to outline some of the identifying characteristics of the Millennium. All of this will be done primarily by analyzing Revelation 20:1-6 and a handful of parallel/supporting passages.

There are two primary positions of interpretation when it comes to Revelation 20:1-10. The first is held by the majority of Amillennialists and Post-millennialists. That is the idea of Recapitulation. The tenet of Recapitulation is that the prophecies of the book of Revelation as well as the prophecies of Revelation 20:1-10 are given in cycles. They simply keep repeating themselves giving more information or more detail to events already past and or present, but not primarily future.<sup>1</sup> Those that are in this camp believe that Revelation 20:1-10 is describing in further detail the events outlined in Revelation 19:11-21. White and others do not see a chronological order of events flowing from 19:11 – 20:10. But rather they see, 19:11-21 along with 20:1-3 occurring at the cross with Christ’s death and resurrection, and 20:4-10 occurring now in this present age.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the proponents of this view hold that this present age is the Millennium and that its length is not a literal 1,000 years. This position and these conclusions are a result of White’s Amillennialism and not literal normal hermeneutics.

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<sup>1</sup> White, R. Fowler, *Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev. 20:1-10*; Westminster Theological Journal – Volume 51:2 – Fall 1989 – Pgs. 320-345.

Contrary to the starting point of those who hold to the above position, Ladd said it very clearly, “The passage makes perfectly good sense when interpreted literally”.<sup>3</sup> First of all the length of the Millennium must be established from this passage. In Revelation 20:1-10, a length of 1,000 years is mentioned six times, five of which are in the first six verses. This amount of repetition alone indicates that John finds the length to be of some importance. However, it is clear that Revelation as other passages of Scripture use figurative language. When is a reader to understand something as figurative and when as literal. The Amillennialists have chosen to view this 1,000 years as figurative.

The interpreter must look for clues in the biblical text which indicate whether a term is used literally or figuratively...In Revelation 20:2-7 χιλια ετη is used six times in connection with a number of chronological interrelated events. John appears to be setting up a definite timetable of events relative to the 1,000 years. There is no indication in these verses that χιλια ετη means anything but a definite span of 1,000 years. The literal meaning of χιλια ετη is confirmed by the fact that in verse 3 the duration of Satan’s release after the 1,000 years is described by the indefinite phrase μικρον χρονον (“a short time”). So when John speaks of indefinite time he uses indefinite terms. It would seem most natural therefore to understand χιλια ετη as a definite 1,000 year period since in the same context the author has demonstrated the use of an indefinite term for an indefinite period of time. The context indicates a literal not a figurative use of temporal terms in Revelation 20:2-7.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Poythress, Vern Sheridan, *Genre And Hermeneutics In Rev. 20:1-6*; JETS – Volume 36 #1 – March 1993 – Pgs. 42-55.

<sup>3</sup> Ladd as quoted in Townsend, Jeffery, *Is the Present Age the Millennium*; BibSac – Volume 140 #559 – July 1983 – Pgs. 207-221.

<sup>4</sup> Townsend, Jeffery, *Is the Present Age the Millennium*; BibSac – Volume 140 #559 – July 1983 – Pgs. 207-221.

No one has yet demonstrated from ancient literature why the number one thousand should have any symbolic significance...Furthermore, a concordance study will reveal that...ετος ("year" wie outed w

Revelation as a whole is not in strict chronological order, 19:11-20:15 evidently is.”<sup>7</sup> Now that it has been established that the events in Revelation 19:11-20:15 are in chronological order, the question is, when do the events of Revelation 20:1-6 occur?

It seems quite reasonable that 19:11-21 describes the second advent of Christ and the corresponding cataclysmic judgment on His enemies. Daniel 7 offers an instructive parallel to this event... Both Daniel 7:22, 27 and Revelation 20:4-6 affirm that immediately following the destruction of the world ruler the kingdom is given to the saints. Thus it is apparent that at least up to the reign of the saints Revelation 19:11-20:6 is following the same pattern as Daniel 7. Since the world ruler is yet future, the millennial reign must also be future for the saints do not reign or receive their kingdom until after his destruction.<sup>8</sup>

Most Amillennialists and Post-millennialists will agree to the part of the above quote that Revelation 19 is still future. Where they will differ is in the chronological sequence of 20:1-6. They will argue as shown above that this is a recapitulation of 19:11-21. This position has already been clearly refuted.

As has been show it is very clear from the text, when interpreted from a literal normal position that the millennial kingdom is a literal future 1,000 years to immediately follow the events in Revelation 19:11-21 (the destruction of the Beast, False Prophet and their followers).

### **What will Uniquely Characterize the Millennial Kingdom?**

The are three “I saw” phrases in Revelation 20:1-6, outlining three major characteristics of the Millennial Kingdom, the binding of Satan, the saints judging on the thrones, the first resurrection.

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<sup>7</sup> Townsend, Jeffery, *Is the Present Age the Millennium*; BibSac – Volume 140 #559 – July 1983 – Pgs. 207-221.

### *The Binding of Satan*

The very fact that this passage refers to a binding of Satan requires the existence of Satan. It has become very popular even among Evangelicals in recent years to deny the existence of Satan. This passage along with many others throughout Scripture flies in the face of such teaching. In Revelation 20:1-3 the Holy Spirit through John gives all Christians the “book end” to the beginning of Scripture. Satan enters the scene of human history in Genesis 3 as the serpent (“that old serpent” here in Revelation 20:2), to deceive Eve (“Satan” which mean adversary, Revelation 20:2). Satan enters again in Job chapter one to accuse Job to God (“Devil” which means accuser, Revelation 20:2). The last name given in Revelation 20:2 for Satan is the “dragon”, which is the source of power for the Antichrist in Revelation 13:4. This passage begins the final chapter in the epoch battle between Satan and the True and Living God.

The ironic part of this “book end” is that God Himself does not descend from Heaven to bind Satan, nor does He send Christ, He doesn’t even send an archangel or seraph, but a nameless angel! God makes His point very clear as to who is the more powerful. Even one of His angels under God’s power and direction can bind Satan for 1,000 years in the abyss.

One of the great Evangelical commentators on Revelation suggests that the chapter before us may contain a clue as to why many churches ignore this book (except for chapter 2 and 3 and a few other fragments). There is no book, he opines, that Satan fears more. Why? It announces first his sure humiliation by angelic power, and then his destruction

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<sup>8</sup> Deere, Jack S., *Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4-6*; BibSac – Volume 135 #537 – January 1978 – Pgs. 59-74.

afterwards.” The devil hates this book and its prophecy of his doom, and he hates for people to read it.<sup>9</sup>

This angel will be given the authority to open and seal the abyss. This place, which is distinguished from Hell and Hades is to be Satan’s location of confinement for a literal 1,000 years. The primary reason for his confinement is to restrict him from deceiving the nations. This binding of Satan is one characteristic that makes the millennial kingdom possible and is another reason why this present age cannot be the millennium.

John concludes these three verses letting his readers know that Satan will be loosed one more time. This time he is not specific as to the length, but the reader will learn in verses 7-10 that the purpose of this loosing is so Satan can once again deceive the nations. For the final time God will completely defeat Satan, as he is thrown into the lake of fire, where the beast and false prophet have been kept since the end of the Tribulation.

### *The Thrones*

Thrones are mentioned by John in several places throughout Revelation. He mentions God’s throne, Christ’s throne and the throne of the twenty-four elders. However, in verse four of this chapter the only qualifying phrase is, “...and seated on them were those to whom judgement was committed”. It would seem clear from that phrase that the thrones cannot be referring to the thrones of God and Christ. It would hardly be needed for the authority of judgment to be given to them. Given this writers position that the “I saw” phrases of John are temporal markers for his readers, then these thrones cannot be occupied by the Tribulation martyrs either since they are not resurrected until the next half of the verse and are presented as a separate group of people.

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<sup>9</sup> MacLeod, David, *The Third “Last Thing”: The Binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3)*; BibSac – Volume 156 #624 – Oct. 1999 – Pgs. 470-487.

Some have argued that these are the twenty-four elders.<sup>10</sup> However, this does not seem likely from the context of Revelation. On a whole throughout the book, when John is speaking about the twenty-four elders, he tells his reader just that. He does not leave the reader to guess, but very clearly points them out when they are in view. Also from this passage, the context is dealing with events taking place on earth. The angel comes down to earth to bind Satan and the rest of the passage speaks of ruling and reigning on earth, along with a conclusive battle on earth. It would be very much out of place for John to turn back to heaven for just this on statement.

Rather it seems clear from other passages and from the point of view that this is an earthy vision that John is seeing saints from all ages ruling and reigning with Christ.

It is more likely that all the saints are in view. In several places John records the promise of a share in Christ's throne and reign (Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10). Paul also mentions that the saints will judge the world (I Cor. 6:2). Therefore, in 20:4 John saw the saints of all ages on the thrones...It may be likely, however, that John does not see the totality of the saints of all ages, but rather, only those who have been faithful and who have "overcome" (cf. Rev. 2:26; 3:21). The same idea may be behind the promise of various "crowns" elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:27; 2 Tim 4:8; James 1:12). One might also compare such passages as 2 Timothy 2:11-13; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; and Matthew 25:26.<sup>11</sup>

These saints will be given the authority to judge on earth during these 1,000 years. During the Millennium the earth will be repopulated by the remaining saints that do not die during the Tribulation and there will be a need for people in leadership who will judge and rule according to

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<sup>10</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), p. 296.

<sup>11</sup> Deere, Jack S., *Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4-6*; BibSac – Volume 135 #537 – January 1978 – Pgs. 59-74.

the King's wishes. The saints, possible limited to church age saints (this will be looked at further in the next section) will have the privilege and authority.

### *The First Resurrection*

This resurrection in the last part of verse four through verse six brings up three questions; who is being resurrected, what "type" of resurrection is this, and finally what type of reign will these people have?

Who is being viewed as resurrected in these verses? The group of people is clearly identified in verse four by two positive and two negative statements. They are identified as ones who were beheaded. This is reminiscent of corporal punishment by the state. First for their testimony of Jesus Christ and secondly for their obedience to the Word of God. Negatively, they are identified as those who did not worship the beast nor take his mark. This is a very clear description of the tribulation saints. Those that were faithful to death during the time of Great Trouble.

The martyrs identified themselves with Jesus by proclaiming Him and obeying Him. They separated themselves from the state by refusing to worship the beast or his image and by refusing to receive his mark. In doing so they paid the penalty of death (13:15).<sup>12</sup>

Because Scripture does not give a clear statement about when the Old Testament saints will be resurrected, some believe that they will be included in this resurrection. The writer of this paper holds to this position as well for the following reasons. It should be stated that one need

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<sup>12</sup> Deere, Jack S., *Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4-6*; BibSac – Volume 135 #537 – January 1978 – Pgs. 59-74.

not hold to a position dogmatically that the Bible is not dogmatic on. These reasons are the logical reasons of the writer.

1. There are only three resurrections clearly mentioned in Scripture.
2. It seems as though the rapture is something unique to the church which is the bride of Christ. It would not seem to be the place to include the saints from the Old Testament.
3. The other resurrection is mentioned in verse 5 of Revelation 20 as for those that remained dead. It seems clear that this resurrection is for those who are dead without Christ and possibly for those who are saved, but die during the millennium.
4. Seeing that the Tribulation is the culmination of Earth history for the Jewish nation and the majority of the Old Testament saints would be Jewish, this writer's logical conclusion is that the Old Testament saints will be included in this resurrection called the "first resurrection" here in Revelation 20:5.

Is this resurrection a physical or spiritual resurrection? Some hold to the idea that this resurrection is the resurrection of the soul. However, this view has serious exegetical and contextual problems.

While some try to view this resurrection as a regeneration of the soul or as the soul's entrance to heaven at death, the usage of *αναστασις* precludes such an interpretation. In over forty occurrences the word always refers to the resurrection of the body. The only exception to this usage is Luke 2:34 where the word is used in its etymological sense of "rising." So the resurrection in view in Revelation 20:5 is a literal resurrection which, according to verse 6, is reserved for believers.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Deere, Jack S., *Premillennialism in Revelation 20:4-6*; BibSac – Volume 135 #537 – January 1978 – Pgs. 59-74.

If, in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned, where certain ψυχαι ἐξήσαν at the first, and the rest of the νεκροὶ ἐγήσαν only at the end of a specified period of after that first, - if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave; -- then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then so is the second...but if the second is literal, then so is the first.<sup>14</sup>

Even, Amillennialists and Post-millennialists hold that the second resurrection mentioned in verse 5 is a literal physical resurrection. Exegetically, it is impossible for one to hold that one of these resurrections is spiritual and one is physical. It is very clear from this passage that this first resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs and possibly the Old Testament saints is a physical bodily resurrection.

What will be the role of these saints? All that John tells his readers in this passage is that these saints will reign with Christ 1,000 years. Obviously, as has been shown throughout the paper the period of their reign will be a literal 1,000 year millennial reign on earth sometime still future. However, it is not completely clear what their reign will be and if it will differ from the reign of those mentioned in beginning of verse four. Once again since Scripture is not dogmatic on this point then neither will the writer of this paper. It seems possible from the passage that their reign will be similar if not the same as the church age saints that are viewed as reigning on thrones in the first half of verse 4.

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<sup>14</sup> Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, rev. Everett F. Harrison, 4 vols. [Chicago: Moody Press, 1958], 4:732. As quoted by Townsend, Jeffery, *Is the Present Age the Millennium*; BibSac – Volume 140 #559 – July 1983 – Pgs. 207-221.

In conclusion it is very clear from this passage that there will be a literal 1,000 year period still future to follow the defeat of the beast and false prophet at the end of the tribulation. This period of time will be characterized by the binding of Satan, the reigning of the church age saints and the resurrection and reign of the tribulations saints. What a joyous time this will be to be with all the believers of all the ages together worshipping and serving the King.

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