

## 11. The Thousand-Year Reign of Christ on Earth is False: Revelation 20

The thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, over an earthly kingdom, is false teaching. The idea taken from Revelation 20 is the centerpiece and foundation of all millennial theories. Without the thousand-year reign on earth, all these theories fail, along with the sectarian theology they have created. The Bible uses the phrase—*thousand years*—ten times. Revelation 20 uses it five of these ten; and the other five times refer to the indefinite way God considers time. The first example of how God considers time in Ps 90:4-6, where the psalmist said:

4 For a thousand years in your sight  
are like a day that has just gone by,  
or like a watch in the night.  
5 You sweep men away in the sleep of death;  
they are like the new grass of the morning —  
6 though in the morning it springs up new,  
by evening it is dry and withered.

The use of *like* and the disparate meanings of *day* and *year* leave no doubt as to the metaphoric nature of the phrase—time with God is indefinite. Peter makes the metaphor certain in 2 Peter 3:8-9 by a double use in the same sentence, eliminating any room for misunderstanding:

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.

If there were no contextual indications of this indefinite meaning of *a thousand years* (of which there are many), the metaphor is amply defined in all of its other Biblical uses. To suddenly place another meaning upon it, ignoring the Biblical use, is overt perversion.

### **Revelation 20 Begins with Symbolic Language**

Revelation 20:1-3 begins the chapter with a symbolic statement that includes a *thousand years*:

1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

### **A Figurative Chain Binds the Devil**

That a literal chain bound the devil runs counter to all the rest of what the Bible teaches about his nature—the *chain* is symbolic as the *thousand years* is symbolic. Unless one sticks closely to the scriptures, symbolic language is easy to distort. However, there is no disputing the symbolic meaning of *dragon*; for the scripture itself explains it by the marshaling of all the metaphors used for the devil: *dragon, serpent, devil, and Satan*. To take one part of the passage as symbolic—devil, with all his meanings and chain--and arbitrarily to take another part literal—a thousand years—violates all principles of correctly handling the word of truth. 2 Tim 2:15 teaches:

15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

The error that millennial folk make is two-fold. They fail to comprehend and apply what the scriptures say about a *thousand years*. They pervert the present passage by switching from literal to figurative meanings as suit their purposes.

The rest of the New Testament tells exactly how Christ bound the devil and for how long. The purpose of the sealing and locking up of the devil was “to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore.” Christ accomplished all this when he came to earth, left his word and the Holy Spirit, and conquered death.

### **Christ’s Power over the Devil**

From the beginning of his earthly ministry, Christ showed power over the devil—a power that eventually led to his victory over death and his sending of the Holy Spirit to aid the disciples. During his temptation by the devil, Jesus rebuked him with a command, showing that the dragon’s power was on the wane, “10 Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.” Matthew 4:10-11. Later, while speaking to Peter in Mark 8:33, Jesus commanded, “Get behind me, Satan !. . .You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Not only was Jesus able to command and rebuke the devil, but he established power over the kingdom of the devil—evil lusts, sin, and demons. He extended his power to his disciples in Luke 10:18-20:

18 He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

### **How the Devil Is Bound**

The devil continued to be bound after Christ ascended. The church, his kingdom, received protection during this long, but indefinite time, called here, a thousand years. John has written in his gospel in John 14:16-18:

“16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

The chain that binds the devil is the word of God, written by the apostles and prophets and testified to by the saints. In Revelation 19:10, the angel told John: “I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” It is the testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy, that keeps the dragon from deceiving the nations anymore. The truth is there for all to know. Not even the gates of Hades shall overcome the Lord’s church (Matthew 16:16-19).

### ***The Reigning with Christ and First Resurrection Define the Thousand Years***

The parameters of the thousand years began when Christians began to reign with Christ and ends when the first resurrection gives way to the second death and the second resurrection. Rev 20:4-6 reads:

4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ **a thousand years**. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. 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**. [Emphasis added.]

### The Kingdom of Christ in Existence

At the same time as the binding of the dragon by the power of a resurrected Christ, the kingdom of Christ came into existence. These two events—the binding of the devil and the beginning of the kingdom of Christ—mark the beginning of the metaphoric thousand years. It is during this time that those given authority to judge sit upon the thrones. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3: “2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!” Jesus, while yet living in this world, promised his disciples in Matthew 19:28, “28 Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’”

John next saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. John had met these souls at the opening of the seals in Revelation 6:9-11:

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

### The First Death and First Resurrection

The time of their vindication is near. All Christians die for the word of God. All Christians experience this death when they die to sin. Paul describes, in detail, the death of Christians to sin and the resurrection to a new life, called here *the first resurrection*. In Romans 6:5-11, Paul explains the first resurrection:

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

For souls to obey Christ and rise with him to walk in newness of life is the new birth spoken of by Jesus to Nicodemus in John 3:3-7:

3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"

That they should not worship the beast nor receive the mark of the beast is critical to those raised with Christ. These Christians will come to life—the first resurrection where they are raised from baptism to walk in newness of life. These same Christians will reign with Christ for the thousand years. The beginning of the thousand years started when these Christians began to enter the kingdom. Jesus said, while on earth, in Mark 9:1: "1 And he said to them, 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'" Paul showed that Christians were brought into the kingdom in Colossians 1:12-14, "12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

### **When Christ's Kingdom Began on Earth and in Heaven**

Christ's kingdom has been on the earth from the time God first brought saints into it on the day of Pentecost after Christ's death. The thousand years and this kingdom on earth, the church, began at the same time. John has witnessed this principle repeatedly in the revelation. Two examples will suffice: Revelation 1:5-6 states, "5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father." The combination of the perfect tense verb, *has made*, (an action begun in the past and continued to the present) and the present tense infinitive, *to be* (a permanent state of being), show us in a kingdom from that first day, continuing forever. The praise of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders affirmed this very principle in Revelation 5:9-10:

You were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased men for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth.

How long this kingdom, now upon the earth, the church, will continue marks the end of the thousand years. Jesus taught that the exact day no one knows in Matthew 24:36-37, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man." In 2 Peter 3:8-10, Peter taught the same thing: "8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. . . . 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be

destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” Although Paul does not give a specific day for the end to come, he does give an unmistakable sequence of happenings, including the end. In 1 Corinthians 15:22-24, Paul wrote:

22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

### **When the Thousand Years Ends**

Therefore, the thousand years is continuing, the Dragon is bound by the spirit of prophecy and the testimony of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit bears witness with out spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, joint-heirs with Jesus (See Romans 8:8-16-17).

The first resurrection is the resurrection from baptism into the death of Jesus that we might walk in newness of life. We are born anew, according to John’s gospel and are of the first resurrection in Rev 20:6-7:

6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. 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**.

Just as the kingdom and the thousand years began with those first Christians and continues to our time, so does the priesthood, which is composed of these same Christians. Peter wrote of Christians in 1 Peter 2:9-10:

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### **The Second Death and the Second Resurrection**

The second death has no power over Christians who have washed away their sins and been raised to walk in newness of life (the first resurrection). Paul described the first death as a spiritual death in Ephesians 2:1-5:

2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

To this first and spiritual death, Paul added the first resurrection in Colossians 3:1-4:

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

The Revelation clearly explains the second death. In Revelation 2:11, Christians learn how to escape it, “11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.” According to Revelation 20:14-15, the

lake of fire is the second death; and in Revelation 21:8, it called the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

### ***The Devil's Doom Defines the End of the Thousand Years***

At the end of the thousand years is the time when Jesus will deliver the kingdom to the father. It will occur when Jesus has overcome all his adversaries. 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 records these events: "24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

Also the devil will be released to receive his just reward as described in Rev 20:7-10:

7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Gog, the king, and Magog, the kingdom, from a prophecy of Ezekiel represent the spiritual battle between the dragon and the church. *The camp of God's people, the city he loves* is the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, the church. Nelson describes that ancient event:

The leader of a confederacy of armies that attacked the land of Israel. Described as "the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal," Gog is also depicted as being "of the land of Magog" (Ezekiel 38:2-3), a "place out of the far north" of Israel. Ezekiel prophetically describes Gog and his allies striking at Israel with a fierce and sudden invasion (Ezekiel 38-39). According to Ezekiel's prophecy, Gog will be crushed on the mountains of Israel in a slaughter so great it will take seven months to bury the dead (Ezekiel 39:12). (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

There is little, if any, evidence that Ezekiel's prophecy historically happened, indicating that the Israel of that prophecy was the spiritual Israel, the church, and the battle was a spiritual battle against those who wear white garments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. Therefore, this passage in Revelation 20 has the same meaning as the battle of Armageddon in Revelation 16:16, the final battle with the beast and the false prophet in Revelation 19:19-20. They, too, were thrown in the fiery lake:

19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

Satan will go first to his doom and Death and Hades will quickly follow in verses 20:14-15. Not all of Satan's resources, gathered from all over the world, could overcome the church, the camp of God's people, the city that he loves. Fire devoured the followers of Satan, and Satan, the devil, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, just like the beast and the false prophet before him. The end of Satan comes in just three verses or 113 words.

## ***Neither Revelation 20 nor Any of the Scriptures Mention a Reign of Christ on the Earth***

Neither Revelation 20 nor any of the scriptures mention a reign of Christ on the earth at any time or any place; it is simply not found in the Bible. The scripture nowhere says that Christ will reign a thousand years. False teachers of the millennial theories base their false doctrine on Rev 20:6: "They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years." The antecedent of the subject *they* is *souls* Rev 20:4: "the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God." These beheaded souls are the ones who reign for a thousand years, not Christ who reigns forever and forever. Rev 11:15 teaches:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom  
of our Lord and of his Christ,  
and he will reign for ever and ever."

Jesus, himself, taught that his kingdom was immediate, and not something of a distant future. In Mark 9:1, the Lord taught: "9 And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." He also taught that it was a spiritual kingdom not of this world in John 18:36: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

All those who have been, all those who are now, or all those who will be Christians, are in his kingdom. In Col 1:12-13, Christian are brought into the kingdom:

12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

It is into this existing kingdom that we are called, according to Paul in 1 Thess 2:11-12:

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

The Christians to whom Hebrews was written were presently receiving the kingdom in Heb 12:28-29:

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

Finally, according to Rev 1:5-6, Christ freed us from sins and made us to be a kingdom:

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

### ***Study Questions from the Scriptures***

1. Ps 90:4-6: How does God compare days and years? When do days and years cease?
2. 2 Peter 3:8-9: How long is a day to the Lords? How long is a year to the Lord?
3. Revelation 1:1-3: How many figures of speech are there in this passage? Who is the devil? What happens to him? How long? Why is the devil bound?
4. 2 Tim 2:15-16: How are we to handle the truth?
5. Matt 4:10-11: What did Jesus tell the devil?

6. Mark 8:33: Who did Jesus rebuke?
7. Luke 10:18-20: What happened to the devil? What authority did Christ give the apostles?
8. John 14:16-19: Who did the Lord give the apostles? For how long ?
9. Revelation 19:10: What do the brothers hold? What is the spirit of prophecy?
10. Matthew 16:16-19: What will not prevail against the church?
11. Rev 20:4-6: Who has the authority to judge? Why had the souls lost their heads? Who came to life and reigned? What is the first resurrection? Over whom does the second death have no power? Who will be priests of God and of Christ?
12. 1 Corinthians 6:2-3: Who will judge the world? Who will judge the angels?
13. Matthew 19:28: Who will sit on the twelve thrones? When will they sit there?
14. Revelation 6:9-11: Why had the souls been slain? What were they given?
15. Romans 6:5-11: How do Christians die? How are they united with Christ in the resurrection? To what did Christ die? What is done away in baptism? 16. John 3:3-7: What must you do to see the kingdom of God?
17. Mark 9:1: How do we know the kingdom has already come?
18. Colossians 1:12-14: Into what were Christians brought? What is our inheritance?
19. Revelation 1:5-6: Who is the ruler of the kings of the earth? What has he made us to be?
20. Revelation 5:9-10: Since we are made to be a kingdom, where do we reign?
21. Matthew 24:36-37: When will the coming of the Lord be?
22. 2 Peter 3:8-10: What is a day like to the Lord? What is a year like to the Lord?
23. 1 Corinthians 15:22-24: When will the end come? What will happen to the kingdom?
24. Romans 8:8-16-17: Who will be joint heirs with Christ?
25. Rev 20:6-7: Over whom does the second death have no power?
26. 1 Peter 2:9-10: What does Peter say we are?
27. Ephesians 2:1-5: What is the present world like?
28. Revelation 2:11: Who will not be hurt by the second death?
29. Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8: What is the second death?
30. 1 Corinthians 15:24-26: Who is the last enemy destroyed?
31. Rev 20:7-10: What will happen to the devil?
32. Revelation 19:19-20: What will happen to the beast and the false prophet?
33. Rev 11:15: What has the kingdom of the world become? How long will Christ reign?
34. John 18:36: How do you know Christ's kingdom is not of this world?
35. 1 Thess 2:11-12: Into what does God call us?
36. Heb 12:28-29: 28: What kind of kingdom are we receiving?