

*Bible Study Revelation*  
*Chapter 20*

The previous chapter described the gathering of vast human armies, all under the command of Satan and the antichrist, to challenge God Himself. Christ returns to earth, along with His army of angels. The resulting battle of Armageddon is a rout. Christ destroys the human armies, and casts the Antichrist and his deputy the False Prophet into hell.

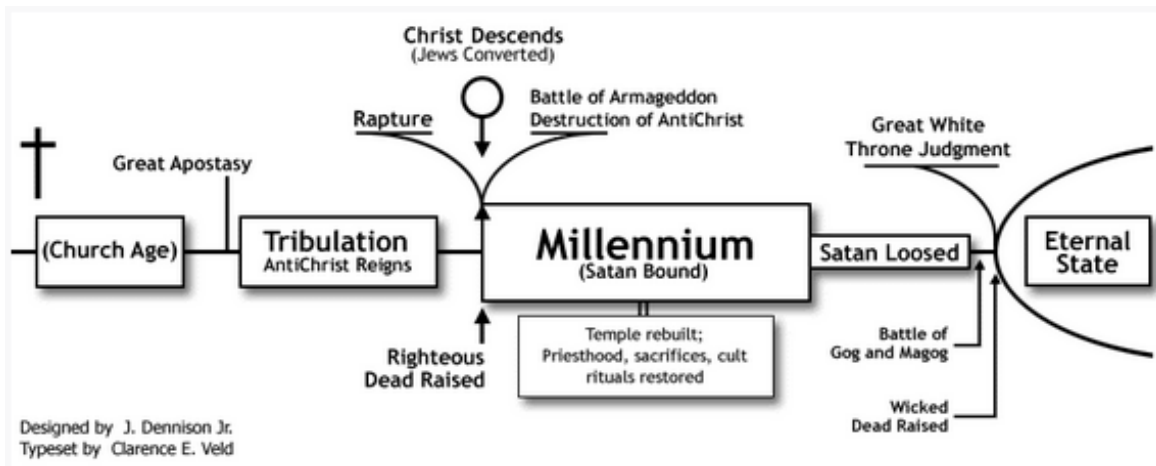
This chapter begins with Christ judging Satan:

*“<sup>20:1</sup> Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. <sup>2</sup> He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; <sup>3</sup> and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.”*

Over the past 2,000 years, the “thousand years” in this chapter has been interpreted three ways. Each school of interpretation looks at this chapter from Revelation, views the events differently, and produces its own sequence of events for the past, present and future. The term “*Millennium*” means “thousand” in Latin. The Greek equivalent is “chilia,” which is more commonly used in Orthodox circles.

The first school of interpretation of this chapter is called “premillennialism.” It believes Christ will return before (“pre-”) a literal earthly thousand year (“-millennium”) rule over the earth. Premillennialism comes from a very literal interpretation of this chapter of Revelation. According to this view, Christ returns to earth, destroys Christ’s earthly enemies, imprisons Satan for a literal thousand years, and rules over the earth with purity and justice. At the end of that thousand years, Satan and his demons are released, and there is one more rebellion on earth. Christ crushes that rebellion, raises the dead for a second time (the first was at His return), and judges humanity. He then creates a new heaven and new earth, and eternity begins. Premillennialism can be described in this timeline of events:

### *Premillennialism*



### *Amillennialism*

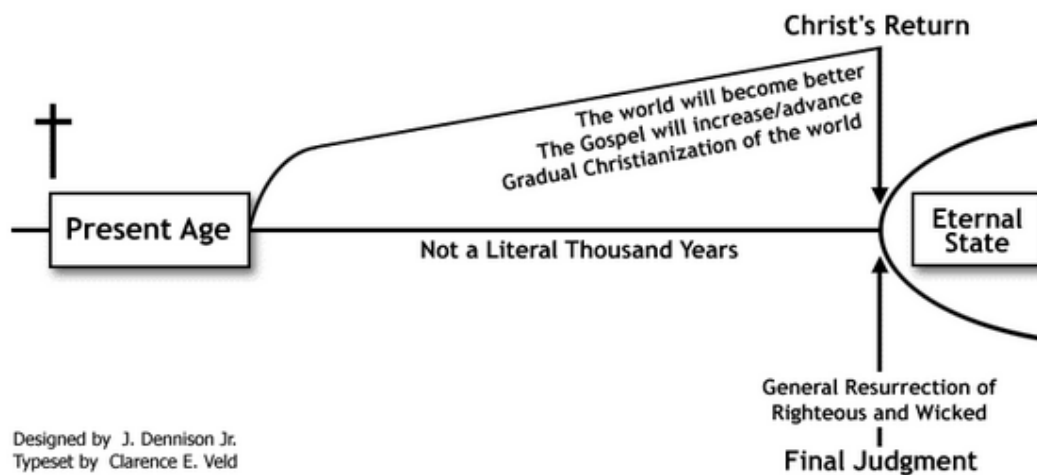
Another school of interpretation of Revelation 20-22 is “Amillennialism.” It is also called “chiliasm” from the Greek word *chilia* (χίλια) which means “thousand.”

This term comes from combining the “a-” with “millennium.” In Greek “a” means “not” or “no,” so “amillennialism” means that there is no literal thousand-year reign of Christ on earth between the second coming of Christ and eternity. The thousand-year reign is not literal, but a symbol, usually of the Church age. Amillennialism can be described this way:



Premillennialism and Amillennialism are the two most common forms of interpretation of Revelation 22-23 today. There is a third, called “Postmillennialism,” which believes that the thousand years in Revelation is a symbol of an era of peace and prosperity as a result of human improvement. Postmillennialism believes Christ will come at the end of that millennium. It can be described this way:

## Postmillennialism



Postmillennialism was once very popular in some Christian circles, but it is so rare today it is barely worth mentioning. It depended on a strong belief in the perfectibility of humanity and civilizations, but World Wars 1 and 2 seem to have made that optimism untenable ever since.

Premillennialism and Amillennialism were both present in the early days of the Church. Both seem to have coexisted until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when Augustine changed his mind from premillennialism to amillennialism. Both the Christian West and East followed his lead. Premillennialism as a doctrine practically disappeared for the next 1,000 years. Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and the Protestant Reformers were all amillennial. Premillennialism began to reappear among the American Puritans in the 1700's, and has become wildly popular among evangelicals since the 1800's.

The text of Revelation continues:

*<sup>4</sup> And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.  
<sup>5</sup> But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."*

The Orthodox (amillennial) view the 1,000 years in this passage as a symbol for a long period of time. Most Orthodox believe it refers to the long period of time between Christ's first coming and second coming. Others believe it refers to the long period between Christ's first coming and extending into eternity. Fr. Panayiotis believes refers to the thousand years between The Bible is often symbolic in its description of time periods. For example,

the Old Testament prophet Joel prophesied of the coming “Day of the Lord” (Joel chapter 2). That Day of the Lord included this description:

*“Blow the trumpet in Zion,  
And sound an alarm in My holy mountain!  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble;  
For the day of the LORD is coming,  
For it is at hand...*

*“And it shall come to pass afterward  
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your old men shall dream dreams,  
Your young men shall see visions.  
<sup>29</sup> And also on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”*

At Pentecost, Peter identified that day as a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy:

*“<sup>6</sup> But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:  
‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your young men shall see visions,  
Your old men shall dream dreams...  
<sup>18</sup> And on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;  
And they shall prophesy.”*

Joel’s prophecy of the Day of the Lord was indeed fulfilled on the birthday of the Church. The Holy Spirit was truly poured out on all flesh, and Israel’s sons and daughters did indeed prophesy. However, Joel’s prophecy of the Day of the Lord also included the following:

*<sup>30</sup> “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:  
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.  
<sup>31</sup> The sun shall be turned into darkness,  
And the moon into blood,  
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. (Joel 2:30-31)*

This prophecy of “blood and fire” and “the sun turned into darkness” and “the moon turned into blood” was not fulfilled at Pentecost, but it will in the future. The book of Revelation, referring to the end times, contains specific mentions of “Blood and fire” and “smoke” and “the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood.” Paul echoes the “Day of the Lord” as an apocalyptic event, as well as Pentecost.

*<sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.  
<sup>3</sup> For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (Thessalonians 5:2-3)*

Clearly, in the Bible, the “Day of the Lord” is not a literal 24-hour day. It began to be fulfilled on the birthday of the Church, and continues to the end of time. If the “Day of the Lord” is a description of time that is symbolic and not literal, then the millennium of Revelation can also be symbolic and not literal. The Apostle Peter sums it up: *“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” (2 Peter 3:8).*

The book of Revelation contains many other obvious symbols. For example, six times the book of Revelation describes the antichrist as having ten horns (Revelation 12:3, 13:1, 17:7, 17:12, 17:16). Not even the most literal interpreters believe the human antichrist will actually have ten horns. The same symbolism of the ten horns can easily be applied to the thousand-year millennium.

If the 1,000-year rule of Christ on earth in the end times is not literal, then what does it mean symbolically? The most common answer in Orthodoxy is the symbolic 1,000 years will be the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God, both in heaven, and as the Church on earth. The thousand years of peace and tranquility described in Revelation 20 began with the establishment of the Church. It is a colony of the Kingdom of God on earth.

It contains all the components of God’s kingdom – the Holy Spirit to live within it, the Holy Tradition to guide it, the Apostolic Succession of bishops to shepherd it, Baptism and Chrismation to populate it, Holy Communion to constantly nourish it, Confession to purify it, the liturgical life to unify it, and active philanthropy to impart its life to the world around it. Someday the colony that is the Church will no longer be a colony but will inhabit both earth and heaven.

Christ said, *“...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).* Christ built his Church by His resurrection, and the Holy Spirit was poured out on it at Pentecost. For the past 2,000 years, the Church has been locked in a struggle against the gates of hell. It is important to note that when Christ said “the gates of hell will not prevail against it” that gates are defensive. They exist to keep an enemy out. The “gates of Hades” are on defense. The Church is on offense. It has been partially successful. The Gospel of Christ has been preached throughout the world. The Orthodox Church is now on every continent except Antarctica. The Church has suffered much in that struggle, however one day the gates of hell will collapse, once and for all, like the walls of Jericho crumbled before the Israelites by the power of God. That final victory of the kingdom of God and His Church is what the vision of the thousand year reign of Christ in Revelation is all about.

Premillennialists believe in a literal 1,000 year period, where the earth is restored to its pristine state before the Fall. There are many prophecies that predict a future new, perfect earth, but this is the most famous one:



*“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb; The leopard shall lie down with the young goat; The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain...  
...For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 16)*

The premillennialists assign this scene of earthly bliss to the thousand-year reign in Revelation. Orthodoxy assign this same vision to the New Heaven and the New Earth, which God will create at the beginning of eternity. (We will see more of the New Earth in chapter 21.) Peter describes it: *“Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”* (2 Peter 3:13).

For example, it is widely speculated that animals will be in heaven since they provide so much joy to people who love them. For animal lovers, heaven would not be heaven without them. This is pious speculation, but there is no speculation that the New Earth will have animals. After all, it will be a re-creation of the Garden of Eden, a place where animals were abundant. Like Isaiah’s prophecy of peaceful animal kingdom, all the prophecies describing earthly bliss can be explained this way. Premillennialists also believe in the New Heaven and the New Earth, but they feel the need to assign these prophecies to a millennium and not to the New Heaven and the New Earth. Orthodoxy needs no separate category to place them.

*“<sup>7</sup> Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup> and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. <sup>9</sup> They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. <sup>10</sup> The devil, who deceived them, was*

*cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”*

This passage has caused great confusion for many Protestant Christians. They see in Revelation a millennium where Satan is bound, and conclude that Satan does not seem to be bound now, so it must be in the future. They also see two resurrection days and judgement days instead of one. Fr. John Whiteford addresses these objections well. Concerning the supposed 1,000 year gap between Christ’s return and His Judgement Day, Fr. John writes (<https://orthochristian.com/86556.html>). Regarding the 1,000 year gap between Christ’s return and the resurrection/judgement, he writes:

*“Such an interpretation does not square with what is stated clearly elsewhere in Scripture, that when Christ returns He will raise the dead and judge everyone:*

*“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” ([Matthew 16:27](#)).*

*“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats” ([Matthew 25:31-32](#)).*

*“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” ([1 Thessalonians 4:15-17](#)).*

*“... when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” ([2 Thessalonians 1:7b-9](#)).*

*It makes far more sense to understand the thousand years to be an indefinite time between the first and second comings of Christ.* St. Andrew of Caesarea points out that often the number "one thousand" is used to refer to an indefinite number:

*"By the number one thousand years by no means is it reasonable to understand so many years. For neither concerning such things of which David said, "the word which he commanded for a thousand generations" [[Psalm 104/105\]:8](#)] are we able to count out these things as ten times one hundred; rather they are to mean many generations" (Andrew of Caesarea, trans. Eugenia Scarvelis Constantinou, Andrew of Caesarea, Commentary on the Apocalypse, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011) p. 206).*



Fr. John points out that the Nicene Creed is unambiguous on this point. It says “And He shall come again in glory, to judge the living and the dead, whose Kingdom shall have no end.” The Symbol of Faith of the Orthodox Church does not teach a thousand year gap between Christ’s return and His one – not two – Judgement Day.

Regarding the “binding of Satan” Fr. John writes:

*“As for the releasing of Satan and the deception of the nations to refer to the coming of the antichrist, and the last days before the second coming. The binding of Satan does not mean that he has no power at all during this period, but that he is restrained until just before the end of this age. This also aligns with what St. Paul said about the coming of the antichrist and the great falling away:*

*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way ([2 Thessalonians 2:3-7](#)).*

*St. Andrew of Caesarea says that this binding is what Christ spoke about in which He said that to spoil the house of a strong man, the strong man must first be bound (Ibid, p. 205f, cf. [Matthew 12:29](#); [Mark 3:27](#); [Luke 11:21-22](#)). This statement, in all three of the Synoptic Gospels, is in the context of Christ speaking of the power by which He caste out demons.”*

If the Protestants do not believe that Satan is largely bound now, as Revelation 20 says, we need only read the book of Revelation to see what will happen when he is truly unbound. The fact that the world is not currently as hellish as it will be in the end times is conclusive evidence that Satan is now largely bound. He cannot create death and destruction on a planetary scale as he wishes now. However someday he will be able to, and will.

Chapter 19 describes Christ’s return to earth. Now comes Judgement Day. There is only one Judgement Day, not two. He will judge all humanity at one time, not in two phases.

*“<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. <sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And the dead were judged according to their works.”*

It is vital to note what will be the criteria of Judgement Day. It will not be according to a one-time cerebral faith only but of what good works one’s faith produced. Verse 11: *“[And the dead were judged according to their works,](#)”* and verse 12: *“...[the dead were judged](#)*



according to their works.” The central criteria of faith AND works is the same in every description of Judgement Day in the Bible.

In Christ’s description of Judgement Day (Matthew 25:31-46), it was only those who did works – who gave food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, gave clothing to the naked, who took in a stranger, visited the sick and the imprisoned - who were received into heaven. Others were shut out. Good works as a vital criterion at Judgement Day is throughout the New Testament:

*“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds” (Romans 2:5-6).*

*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 4:10).*

*“If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth...” (2 Peter 1:17).*

*“For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality” (Colossians 3:25).*

*“Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor” (1 Corinthians 3:8).*

It is not an exaggeration to say that there is no such thing as a Judgement Day in the Bible without works as crucial factor.

*“<sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. <sup>15</sup> And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”*

The long struggle between God and Satan, that began with Lucifer’s rebellion, and continued with struggle over free-willed humanity in the Garden of Eden, is now finally over. God has won. Those who followed Him won with Him. For the righteous, the best is yet to come.