



## **Week Nine: Are the 1000 Years Literal or was Augustine Right?**

**Four Questions from Revelation 20** (In part from Matthew Waymeyer's *Revelation 20 and the Millennial Debate*)

1. When is Satan bound, now or in a future 1000 years?
2. Are these resurrections physical or spiritual?
3. Is the thousand years literal or symbolic?
4. Is Christ's 1000 year reign on earth in the future or from heaven now through the church?

*Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 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. 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. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 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. When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,*

### **Premillennialism before Augustine (from *Christ's Prophetic Plans*, ch. 9)**

While the early church fathers didn't have all the details nailed down, the opinion of many of the early teachers prior to the Nicene Council of AD 325 was that Christ would reign in glory on earth with the risen saints for 1000 years, before the final resurrection and judgment. Leon Wood writes: "No church fathers of the first two centuries are known to have disagreed with this view." Wood lists these early teachers (among others) favoring a literal 1000 year reign of Christ on earth: Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus. (Wood, *The Bible and Future Events*)

### **The Rise of Amillennialism**

Four factors that contributed to the rise of Amillennialism in the third and fourth centuries:

- Allegorical hermeneutics – popularized by Origen of Alexandria, who was influenced by Greek philosophy and tried to integrate Greek philosophy with Christian theology.
- Greek philosophy, with Platonic dualism (spirit is good; matter evil), led to spiritualizing Old Testament promises of material blessings in a coming kingdom.
- A growing animosity toward unbelieving Jews within the church.

- The beginning of the notion of a Christian kingdom under Constantine. “Attempts to defend the doctrine of a literal millennial reign of Christ were vitiated to a great extent by the conversion of the Emperor Constantine.” (AD 312) Millennial blessings were seen as being fulfilled spiritually in the church. With Constantine, the kingdom had already come.

### **Augustine (AD 354-430), the Father of Amillennialism**

Though initially Augustine leaned toward a Premillennial view, under the influence of allegorical hermeneutics and Greek philosophy he rejected this view. He felt the literal kingdom teaching of the Scriptures promoted matter and carnality, so he adopted a symbolic approach, especially to Revelation 20. **HERE’S THE KEY TO PRESENT DAY AMILLENNIALISM** – Augustine spiritualized the kingdom by making the church era the actual non-literal 1000 years. While there are differences in the details, Amillennialism says Satan has been bound since the first coming of Christ. Christ is reigning on earth through the church. The first resurrection in Revelation 20 speaks of regeneration. And the second resurrection takes place at the second coming, not a thousand years later.

Augustine’s Amillennialism became the dominant view throughout the medieval Roman Catholic church and continued through the Reformation and Puritan era, and into much of the Reformed churches of today. The major confessions of the church accepted Amillennialism and see the church as spiritual Israel. This is what is known as replacement theology or supercessionism, the present church replacing Israel and inheriting all the spiritualized promises God made to the nation Israel.

### **So What About Revelation 20? (from *Christ’s Prophetic Plans*, ch. 6)**

We begin with a futuristic view of Revelation, not a preterist (in the past) view. Therefore there is a chronological development through Revelation. The development follows this order:

- Revelation 6-19 – The seven year tribulation period.
- Revelation 19:11-16 – Jesus returns in glory.
- Revelation 19:17-21 – Jesus brings judgment on the Anti-Christ, False Prophet, and armies of the earth
- Revelation 20:1-3 – Satan is imprisoned in the abyss for 1000 years.
- Revelation 20:4-6 – Christ rules the earth with His redeemed and glorified people for 1000 years.
- Revelation 20:7-10 – Satan is released, destroyed by God, and thrown into the lake of fire.
- Revelation 20:11-15 – All unbelievers are judged according to their works and cast into the lake of fire.
- Revelation 21-22 – The eternal state of the new heaven and earth begins.

### **The Two Resurrections**

*Resurrection #1 - Revelation 20:4-5 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. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.*

These people were beheaded, came to life (resurrected), and reigned with Christ for 1000 years on earth in their glorified bodies. “Are you saying glorified saints will interact with non-glorified people on the earth?” “Yes, why not?” Amillennialism says this resurrection is not physical but spiritual, the regeneration of believers during the church age who reign with Christ in this present church age. Problem: The word “resurrection” (see verses 5-6 - Gk ana-stasis) is used 41 times in the New Testament, always of a physical resurrection from the death! If “resurrected” means “regenerated”, then these people would be regenerated after they were beheaded, which is patently absurd.

*Resurrection #2 – Revelation 20:5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.*

These people are resurrected from the dead to stand in their bodies at the Great White Throne Judgment.

### **The Millennium**

The phrase “a thousand years” is used six times in this passage. Symbolic or literal?

Amillennialists and Postmillennialists view these 1000 years as symbolic of a “complete” period of time or an indefinitely long period of time.

But when the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. There is no compelling reason in the context of Revelation to take these 1000 years anything but literally.

### **What will the Millennium be like?**

#### **Politically:**

- Christ will reign as King, fulfilling the David covenant – Isaiah 9:6-7
- King David himself may rule as a prince under Christ – Ezekiel 37:24
- The twelve apostles and resurrected believers have special spheres of rulership – Matthew 19:28

#### **Spiritually:**

- Christ is bodily present on earth.

- Satan is bound.
- Righteousness, peace, and joy rules – Isaiah 11:6-9
- Universal knowledge and worship of Christ – Isaiah 2:2-4
- Millennial temple with memorial sacrifices – Ezekiel 45:23,24

### **Physically:**

- The curse on creation is lifted
- Animals and productivity are changed – Isaiah 65:25 "The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain," says the LORD. Isaiah 32:13-15
- No sickness and deformity – Isaiah 65:20-23.

### **CONCLUSION**

John MacArthur concludes the last chapter in the book *Christ's Prophetic Plans* with this paragraph:

How certain is Futuristic Premillennialism? As certain as the truthfulness and the promises of God in Scripture!

So, the next time someone inquires, "What do you believe about the millennium?" you will not have to employ the lame "Promillennial" or Panmillennial" response spoken of in the preface. Now you can confidently and convincingly answer, "I believe in the biblical certainties of Futuristic Premillennialism."

These prophetic certainties should not only affect your beliefs, but also your behavior (2 Peter 3:13-14, 18).

*But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*

So, with the apostle John let us beseech Messiah, 'Come, Lord Jesus'" (Rev. 22:20).