

WHAT IS THE MILLENNIUM OF REVELATION 20? (1944)

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The purpose of this paper is — not to support one or other of the current millennial theories (pre or post) or to present a new theory but — simply to ascertain what God has revealed in the Holy Scriptures concerning “The thousand years” of Revelation 20, and to state the ascertained facts in “words easy to be understood.”

The first step obviously is to scrutinize verses 1 to 10 of Revelation 20, noting all that is stated therein; for those few verses contain the only mention in the whole Bible of “The thousand years.”

Although no other scripture refers directly to “The thousand years,” it is possible nevertheless that some prophecies do foretell things that were to happen in that era. But we are not warranted in saying of any prophecy that “this will be fulfilled in the millennium,” unless there is clear evidence in the prophecy itself that it does belong to that particular era.

This word of warning is needful because, in current teaching on the subject, it is commonly taken for granted without any proof at all that certain Old Testament prophecies will be fulfilled “in the millennium.”

How then can we know whether or not a particular prophecy relates to the thousand years of Revelation 20? The test is whether the prophecy speaks of one of the topics that are found in Revelation 20:1–10. Thus, the most prominent topic in Revelation 20 is the binding of Satan; and therefore any scripture which speaks of the binding of Satan may properly be taken as referring to the 1,000 years. But it should be stated at the outset that, so far as this writer is aware, **not one** of the prophecies which millennialists commonly cite in support of their teaching is thus related to Revelation 20. The prophecies to which they refer are **always** those of the Old Testament; the reason being that no prophecy of the New Testament lends the slightest support to their doctrine. For there is no hint in any prophecy of the New Testament that the earth is to enjoy a thousand years (or any other period) of peace, plenty and prosperity before the day of judgment. This is very significant; for if the second coming of Christ were to usher in a millennium of earthly blessedness for all nations, and specially for the Jewish people, it is unthinkable that some hint of it should not have been given among all the prophecies that foretell things that will come to pass at the second advent of our Lord.

If, moreover, the millennium were an era of earthly and worldwide peace and prosperity, ushered in by the glorious appearing of our Redeemer accompanied by demonstrations of supernal grandeur and glory in the heavens above and on the earth beneath — the dead in Christ raised incorruptible, living believers transformed in the twinkling of an eye and all caught up together in clouds to meet the Lord in the air — it is surpassingly strange that the inspired seer caught not a glimpse of those stupendous events.

The undeniable fact is that every prophecy of the Bible, Old and New Testaments alike, that relates to the second advent shows plainly that it will be followed immediately by the great and terrible day of the Lord and then by the new heavens and the new earth.

Let it be specially noted also that Revelation 20 makes no reference whatever to the Jews. It lends not the slightest support to the theory that the Jews are to be gathered back to Palestine and renewed

as a nation, and are to have supremacy over the Gentiles. Every reader can quickly verify this statement for himself by simply reading the first ten verses of Revelation 20; and it is quite sufficient to discredit the premillennial teaching of our day. But that teaching is further and fully discredited by the added fact that, among all the prophecies of our Lord and of His apostles concerning His coming again, *not one word* is said of the revival of the Jewish nation or of any other of the expected happenings of premillennialism.

In a word, the current premillennial doctrine was **not** derived from Revelation 20, or from any other part of the Bible. What then is its source? Regard for the truth compels us to say that it is an unholy compound of first century rabbinism (that is, the doctrine taught by the Jewish rabbis of Christ's day) and of the fabled "golden age" of the pagans.

1. The Happenings of the Millennium of Revelation 20

A preliminary question arises: Are we to take the term "thousand years" as an exact measure of time, or as simply denoting a long period of indeterminate length? This writer favors the latter view, mainly because it is in keeping with the character of this day of God's longsuffering toward mankind (2 Peter 3:9, 15) that it should be of unmeasured length. Moreover, it is significant that the exact expression "a thousand years," found in Revelation 20, occurs nowhere else but in 2 Peter 3:8.

It should also be noted that the several visions of Revelation are not consecutive, but concurrent; and we are therefore warranted in placing the beginning of the millennium near the beginning of the Christian era.

Especially it should be observed that the millennial happenings of Revelation 20 **take place in the spiritual realm** and that the actors therein (including the souls of verse 4) are all **spirit beings**; whereas in the millennium of current teaching both the scene itself and all the actors are earthly.

The most conspicuous personage in the scripture passage is the Devil, who is here identified by the same fourfold designation given in Chapter 12:9 where it is said of him that he "**deceiveth the whole world.**" This is of much significance in connection with the statement of Revelation 20 that his power to deceive **the nations** would be abridged during the 1,000 years.

Next in prominence is an Angel, who has the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand where-with he binds the adversary, setting a seal upon him, so that he should deceive the nations no more until the 1,000 years are ended, when he must be loosed for a little season. The "key," the "chain" and the "seal" are, of course, symbols of corresponding spiritual things; for Satan could not be bound with a material chain.

Lastly the passage speaks of "the souls" of those who had been slain for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus and of those who had not worshipped the beast or accepted his mark. Those "souls" lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. It is not said or implied that they reigned on earth. On the contrary, the context forbids the idea; for it makes no reference to conditions on earth and gives no information in regard thereto.

Thus it is seen that the solitary passage of Scripture which mentions the millennium has contributed to the millennium of current belief **nothing but its name**. Concerning the elaborate and highly colored picture which our dispensationalists have put before our astonished eyes, the truth is that not one of its features, or even of its minor details, was derived from Revelation 20. That picture may be admirable and even fascinating as a work of art, but it cannot be accepted as revelation.

2. Scriptures Topically Related to Revelation 20

In the interpretation of a passage of scripture we should first learn all that can be learned by careful study of the passage itself, and then seek further light thereon from related scriptures; that is, scriptures which deal with the same topics as the passage we are studying. Light may be had from other scriptures upon each of the prominent topics of Revelation 20, namely: (1) The Binding of Satan; (2)

The Souls of the Martyrs; (3) The Deception of the Nations (Gentiles).

1. The Binding of Satan

The binding of Satan was referred to by our Lord in a prophetic parable recorded by Matthew and Luke. The occasion was this: The Pharisees had attributed the Lord's miracle of casting out an evil spirit to the power of Satan. Answering their thoughts Christ said, "If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?" (Matthew 12:26); and further He said, "Or else, how can one enter into the strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and **then he will spoil his house**" (verse 29). It is evident from verse 26 that "the strong man" (the definite article is used) is Satan. Luke's account reads thus: "When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when **the** stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke 11: 21–23). The word "bind" in Matthew 12:29 is the same that is used in Revelation 20:2.

These passages show that the binding of Satan was not to be such as would nullify his power completely, but was partial in its effect; and this agrees with the millennial passage, which states that the binding of Satan was merely such as to deprive him of power to deceive the nations. The parable also shows that the purpose of binding the great adversary was to **effect the salvation of some of those whom Satan was keeping in his kingdom by deceptive means**. From this we may understand **that**, when Christ deprived Satan of his power of deception over the nations, He took from him **the** weapons (**panoply**) wherein he trusted and thus made it possible to divide his spoils — those "spoils" being human souls. Moreover, we have here the evident fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12, in which, following the wondrous foretelling of the atoning sufferings of Christ, we read: "And He shall divide the spoil with **the strong**" (one).

This verse from Isaiah's great prophecy clearly indicates that it was by His sufferings, death, and resurrection (for Isaiah 53:12 implies His resurrection, else He could not divide the spoils with the strong one) that Christ was to **bind** the great deceiver; and this is confirmed by other scriptures, such as Hebrews 2:14, 15, where the declared purpose for which the Son of God "took part of flesh and blood" is "that through death He might destroy I(annul) him that had the power of death, that is THE DEVIL, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Here it is revealed that Satan is a world ruler, who exercises "the power of death," and that 'his sway extends over all mankind. The purpose for which God the Son was made man was that, by His own death, He might set free some of those who, because of the fear of death, were in lifelong bondage.

Thus it is clearly to be seen from even a brief examination of these scriptures that there has been a **binding of Satan** which answers to that of Revelation 20 and has lasted fully a thousand years.

2. And Judgment was given unto them

"The souls of them that were slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held" had been seen by John in a previous vision. They were then "under the altar" (Revelation 6:9). There they cried for **judgment**, saying "How long dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood?" They were bidden to wait yet for a little season until others should be slain as they were. In Revelation 20:4 we read that to **these and to those others** "judgment was given; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

Christ is reigning now, but "at His coming" He will "deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father" (1 Corinthians 15:23, 24). Therefore the beginning of the 1,000 years must be placed after our Lord's ascension, the end thereof being evidently previous to His second coming. And those judgment thrones must be located **where Christ now is** — "in the heavenlies" (Ephesians 1:3, 20; 6:12).

Judgment is not confined to the great and terrible day of the Lord. It culminates then in the judg-

ment of all the living and the dead; but it is always in progress; sometimes involving only individuals as Ananias and Sapphira; sometimes cities, as Sodom; sometimes nations, as Egypt, Babylon, and Israel. Judgment proceeds in the realm of spirits also; for we read that the saints shall judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3). And again we read that “the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17). See also Enoch’s prophecy, quoted by Jude (verses 14, 15).

3. The Deception of the Nations (Gentiles)

This subtopic is closely related to that of the binding of Satan; but it should be remembered that at the time of Christ’s birth all the Gentiles, including even the most cultured nations, were sunk in the darkness of idolatry, being blinded by the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4), and in fact were worshipping Satan under the representations of various idols. Thus that ancient serpent was filling out the description of himself as the one who “deceiveth the whole world.” But a change was about to come. The infant Jesus was acclaimed by Simeon as “A light to lighten **the Gentiles**”; and from near the beginning of the gospel era even **until** now Satan’s deceptive powers have been so far curtailed that the bearers of the gospel message have been able to penetrate the darkest realms of his vast domain, delivering his bondslaves and spreading everywhere the healing light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. During all those centuries God has been visiting “**the Gentiles** to take out from among them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14); thus dividing the spoils with the strong one and leading captivity captive. This could not have been had Satan not been “bound.”

It is appropriate here to recall our Lord’s parting command to His followers for their age-long and worldwide commission to evangelize “all nations”; for that command carries with it the implication that Satan’s power to deceive the nations would be nullified.

At the end of the 1,000 years Satan was to be loosed “for a little season” and go forth to deceive the nations again. Conditions in Russia and elsewhere suggest that that “little season” may already have begun.

“The first resurrection” (verses 5, 6) is closely connected with the millennium. But that is in itself a large subject. Suffice it here to state that the present writer understands that “the first resurrection” is that of the martyrs, just referred to (See Philippians 3:11).

Summing up briefly the results of our study, we find:

1. That the millennium of Revelation 20 is a period whereof the happenings take place in the realm of the unseen things, its only earthly effect being that Satan is restrained during that period from deceiving the Gentiles as he had done during Old Testament times;
2. That it is a period during which “the martyrs of Jesus” (Revelation **17:6**) are specially comforted and honored;
3. That it began some time after our Lord’s ascension.