

The 1,000 Year Reign

Revelation 20:1–6

Revelation 20:1–6 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Introduction

One of the most debated concepts in eschatology (the study of last things/end times) is the nature of the kingdom of Christ (often referred to as the Millennial Kingdom). Many great Christian thinkers of church history have differed in their understanding of the kingdom of Christ. The text before us today is one of the most debated texts in this discussion. The question lies in the nature of the kingdom of Christ. There are three main views regarding the millennial kingdom:

- (1) Amillennialism — *The kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom.* Great theologians of the past (such as the great Augustine) taught that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom made up of the hearts of all those who embrace Christ and look forward to the day when He will return (or the realization of the kingdom made up of Christians in heaven). The kingdom of Christ is happening right now as He reigns from the right hand of the Father.
- (2) Postmillennialism — *The kingdom of Christ will be ushered in by the church triumphant.* Many Christians throughout church history have believed that the church must be “salt and light” in order to bring (or “usher in”) the kingdom of Christ. The kingdom will start small, but as the church continues to spread the Gospel, the kingdom and its influence will slowly grow. Eventually, the spread of the gospel will result in the world prepared to receive her One True King—and the Second Coming of Jesus will come.
- (3) Premillennialism — *The kingdom of Christ will come after the tribulational period and fully inaugurate His earthly kingdom.* This view is referred to as “pre-millennialism” because in this view Christ will return *before* the millennium, whereas in the previous views the Lord comes *after* the millennium (which they suggest is happening either right now or is in the process of happening).

Theologians derive each of these views from the text before us today. Since time does not permit a full-fledged explanation of all the views mentioned above, in short the view that best fits the Biblical evidence is a *premillennial* understanding of Scripture (and in particular of Revelation 20:1–6). A plain understanding of the events recorded in Revelation 19 and 20

suggests that there is coming a day when Christ will destroy the kingdom of the Antichrist and Satan and establish His righteous reign on earth. In other words, it is best to see the events recorded in Revelation 19 and 20 as happening *chronologically*.

With this in mind (i.e., Christ will establish a real, earthly kingdom one day in the future), we can look with the eyes of faith to the day when Christ will come to rule and reign. *Take heart! The coming King of kings and Lord of Lords will bring about the binding of Satan and the inauguration of Christ's righteous reign and sovereign rule.*

I. THE INAUGURATION OF THE REIGN (VV. 1–3)

The Angel. The inauguration of the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ begins not with the King but instead one of his messengers. The first person John sees is an angelic creature coming down from heaven. This angelic creature is not the Lord but clearly received an authority from the Lord to accomplish his task. This angelic creature holds in his hand two things: (1) the key to the bottomless pit, and (2) a great chain. The significance of these two items which the angels holds must not be missed. In possessing the key to the bottomless pit the angel has been given authority from the King to imprison the Accuser of the brethren. It also could represent the length of Satan's sentence—i.e., Satan will be bound for as long as the Sovereign One determines. The chain represents the strength of the Lord over the Devil. Try as he might, Satan will not be able to overcome the chains of God's judgment. He will be bound securely for as long as the King determines and will not be paroled any sooner.

The Defendant. Satan will be bound. Try as he may to escape he will not escape the judgment of God. Satan (literally, *adversary*) will be bound. He is the serpent of old (Gen. 3:1ff) and the Devil. His crimes against the King are egregious. He sought to make a name and throne above the name of the Holy One, led a rebellion of angels away from heaven, deceived the woman in the Garden of Eden, stands before the courts of the King accusing the brethren day and night, and walks through the earth seeking whom he may devour. His reign of terror continues during this present day but one day the Lord will bring about swift judgment against this cosmic villain. He will be imprisoned for the duration of the 1,000 year reign of Christ.

The Sentence. The angel with the key and chains in a methodical way brings judgment upon Satan: (1) he binds him, (2) he casts him into the "bottomless pit" (NASB "the abyss"), (3) shut him up into the bottomless pit, and (4) set the official king's seal upon the abyss, a demonstration of the King's official sentence upon him. He will be shut away so that "he should deceive the nations no more" (v. 3). Clearly,

The Perfect Wisdom of Our God *Stuart Townend & Kieth Getty*

The perfect wisdom of our God
Revealed in all the universe:
All things created by His hand
And held together at His command.
He knows the mysteries of the seas,
The secrets of the stars are His;
He guides the planets on their way
And turns the earth through another day.

The matchless wisdom of His ways
That mark the path of righteousness;
His word a lamp unto my feet,
His Spirit teaching and guiding me.
And O the mystery of the cross,
That God should suffer for the lost,
So that the fool might shame the wise,
And all the glory might go to Christ!

O grant me wisdom from above,
To pray for peace and cling to love,
And teach me humbly to receive
The sun and rain of Your sovereignty.
Each strand of sorrow has a place
Within this tapestry of grace;
So through the trials I choose to say:
"Your perfect will in Your perfect way."

Satan is at work even now. He is attempting to deceive the nations with the end goal that the nations will not submit to the reign of Christ but instead rage against Him. He wants nothing less than to destroy the very ones for whom Christ gave up His life. Hence why we are called as Christians to take up the spiritual armor available to us—so that we can quench the fiery darts of the Evil One (Eph. 6:10ff).

The Release. John makes an interesting comment: “he *must* be released for a short time” (v. 3). He *must* be released? Why is it necessary that Satan be released at all? Why doesn’t the Lord simply chain the serpent of old, cast him into the deep abyss, and throw away the key? Here we come to the great Mystery in the mind of the Almighty. “The secret things belong to the Lord” (Deut. 29:29).

We cannot explain why God has chosen to permit evil to exist, nor can we explain why God permits evil to make a resurgence in the release of Satan. However, we *can* say that we know that God is wise and good in His intention and work. When we wonder whether or not God will bring about good we must remember Who He is—the benevolent, all-wise King of kings and Lord of lords!

II. THE CO-REGENTS OF THE REIGN (VV. 4–6)

The Saints. The Lord will come to reign on His throne in Zion. Yet he is not alone. John saw thrones upon which sat the “souls of those who had been beheaded for the their witness of Christ” (v. 4). Question, some may wonder is: who are these saints? Are these saints from the church age? Are these saints specifically from the Tribulational period? It seems likely that these saints are from the tribulational time since they “did not receive the mark of the beast.” At some point they were martyred for their faith in Christ. What are the rest of the saints from church history doing? They are enjoying the felicity of the righteous reign of Christ.

The Reign. The saints sitting on the throne are given the authority to judge. They exercise judgment in the millennial kingdom. In some way they are exercising a derived authority. In many ways, this is like the divine administration. God has taken those who were once brought low and elevated them to a place of exaltation. The saying is true which our Lord said: “the first shall be last, and the last shall be first” (Matt. 20:16; cf. Matt. 23:12).

The Dead. John makes another interesting comment: “the rest of the dead, did not come to life until the thousand years were completed” (v. 5). Who are the rest of the dead? While there are various interpretations, the most likely answer is that these dead are unbelieving people throughout history. They do not get to participate in the first resurrection. This first resurrection is not only first in order, but also first in preeminence. Later on in chapter 20 we will read of the second resurrection.

First Resurrection: Saints

Second Resurrection: Unbelievers

While some have tried to suggest that the first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection whereas the second resurrection is a physical resurrection, it is best to take the text of Scripture at face value and take the first resurrection as that of the saints and the second resurrection as that of the unbelieving dead.

The Benediction. The final verse provides a benediction for those who are a part of the first resurrection. There have been several benedictions throughout the book to this point (e.g., 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; also, 22:7, 14). Those who take part in this first resurrection are blessed and happy. They will enjoy the righteous rule of King Jesus. Where once these Saints were harmed by Satan and the beast they are now safe and secure—the second death has no power over them. They will serve as priests within the kingdom. Why would John include this benediction? Because for him, this kingdom is still future, which means that the suffering of the Saints will continue until that day. John's purpose, then, is to encourage the saints to press on and persevere in righteousness and true holiness. They must faithfully endure until the end.

Conclusion

The future Millennial reign of King Jesus will be one of the most precious realities we can think about as Christians. It is the beginning of the end, the joy of a righteous ruler and the hope of day without sin. Though the world is growing more and more wicked, we must take heart! The coming King of kings and Lord of Lords will bring about the binding of Satan and the inauguration of Christ's righteous reign and sovereign rule.