

*All Things New: The Millennium and the First Resurrection*

*By Jason Huff*

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*Isaiah 26:19-27:1; John 12:23-33; Revelation 20:1-6*

Our final Scripture reading today is from Revelation 20:1-6. May God bless the reading of His perfect, infallible, and holy Word. “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 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. 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. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 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.”

- Print dictionaries are going the way of the dinosaur. Threw one out not long ago. Not because they’re bad, but because they take up a lot of room and they are incomplete – especially when you can look up anything you want on the Internet
  - Just because the print versions are going out of style doesn’t mean dictionaries are less important.
  - Understanding what words mean and how words are used is incredibly important. Nuance, multiple meanings, spellings, even pronunciations – vital!
  - Killyism (Chiliasm) – spelled like Chili that you’d buy at Wendy’s – it’s a technical term for the study of the 1,000 year reign of Christ in this passage referred to as the millennium
  - This passage is one of the most controversial in the Bible because we have to decide when it happens and how it happens
  - What’s important is that we know our terms and realize that a word can have multiple meanings – as we’ve seen throughout Revelation – and that just because we think we understand a word doesn’t mean we understand it in this context (think about a simple word like cool!)

- We also have to remember the context of the ancient mindset when reading a passage – ancient storytellers weren't concerned about telling a story in perfectly linear fashion where event A happens, then event B, and then event C in time – today we see this in our own storytelling, when authors and movie series go back and explore events in their own worlds – Harry Potter, Star Wars, the Marvel Universe have all moved in their own timelines, and so have many famous authors who have gone back and explored the histories of their most popular characters
- In the last several weeks, we saw the defeat of Babylon the Harlot, the beast, and the false prophet. Because of the order – because Revelation 20 follows after Revelation 19 – it is easy for the modern reader to think that today's passage follows chronologically. One kind of interpretation says that it does, but there are hints that it doesn't.
  - We have not seen the dragon accomplish anything since Revelation 12. You might remember that Revelation 12 was a symbolic vision of Satan and his followers being thrown out of heaven and attempting to make war against Jesus the Messiah from the time of His birth. But since then, the dragon hasn't done anything.
  - In Revelation 13, the dragon gives the beast his power and authority. The dragon is worshiped because of the power given to the beast. In Revelation 16, the last time we see the dragon, an unclean spirit comes out of him to deceive the world. So isn't it odd that the dragon that hates Jesus so much, who in Revelation 12 is said to be making war on the saints, doesn't himself do anything else?
- This is why. As far as I can understand it, the events of this passage happened before the beast and the rest of them even showed up. This passage tells us that at some point, the dragon is bound in the Abyss – the bottomless pit, literally – and has very little power in and of himself until nearly the end of time. The powers we've witnessed brought down by Christ – decadence, war, oppression – were given power by the dragon, by the devil, but they are not the same. In a sense, then, while the devil's work has been going on, the ability of the devil himself to touch the saints has been cut off
  - This makes sense of the world before Christ – only one nation on Earth had claims to know the one true God, and all the nations of the world regularly attacked it, besieged it, tried to take them into exile, split them up, destroy them. Not only is there war against Israel from without, Israel itself is lured to follow foreign gods – it's amazing God even still had a people around – but that people group is very, very small

- In comparison, look at the spread of the Christian church – despite incredible violence that threatened her, false teachers, internal strife and sin, the church grew and grew and grew – now to the point where there are 2.3 billion people who claim Christianity
- It doesn't mean that sin went away or external forces don't battle against us, but that the primary accuser of God's people is and has been greatly limited in what he can actually accomplish. The sheer lack of evil's ability to destroy the church or even reasonably hinder its growth suggests that the ringleader of the rebellion has been hamstrung – while it is possible everything discussed here is still coming at some future point, I believe it is most probable that it has already happened, and that Satan has not been set free to wage his final war against God and God's people – is Satan still on the warpath? Yes, but his power is limited; his minions can do evil, but they cannot defeat God and God's people
- Why does Satan have to be set free at all? Good question. Best idea: by doing so, God will show the absolute corruption of Satan – that time does not change the heart of a fundamentally wicked creature – only by God's choice and design can a heart be changed to one that desires to love and serve God
- Now let's look into the millennium. Satan is bound for a thousand years, and it appears that the saints reign with Christ for a thousand years. What is up with this? Because frankly, this is the only place it's taught in the Bible.
  - Lots of opinions held by solid, biblical Christians who are looking at this from different perspectives – there is no one right answer
  - One is premillennialism – that at the time of the devil's binding, Christ's second coming to earth will occur, and He will reign with the saints for 1,000 years on the earth as it currently exists in a sort of golden age – this runs into problems because in every vision so far, the thrones John has seen are in heaven – also, it requires a very literal view of the millennium in a book that is time and again very symbolic – notice too that Revelation 20 never mentions Christ's return to Earth – while some church fathers believed this, it didn't gain popularity until the last two centuries, and primarily among evangelicals
  - Another view is postmillennialism – the idea that the world is going to get better and better until there is a thousand year golden age, and then Christ will return – very popular in the 1800s and early 1900s as people saw incredible technological progress and assumed it was leading to an era of world peace – the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even the events of the last three months should help us dismiss this

- The major view of the church throughout history is sometimes called amillennialism, and what that really means is for a great period of time represented by the number 1,000 (often used in Revelation as a perfect number), the saints will reign with Christ in heaven – that we are in this period now – Jesus will return when He returns, and that we shouldn't expect a literal 1,000 year reign either before or after He comes
- There are some keys to look at this with:
  - John sees souls, not resurrection bodies
  - The wording that there is a first resurrection suggests to us that there must be a second, later resurrection – what has often been called the second or general resurrection of everyone
  - When we read the Greek carefully, we see that John both speaks about the martyrs and about Christians who had not taken the mark of the beast – they come to life, but there is no discussion of a physical body
  - This is the resurrection of the soul of the saints from death
  - There is a physical resurrection to come, but this is not it – this is a spiritual resurrection – this is why definitions are so important – it's the same word, but it is not the final resurrection of the body but the release of the soul from the grip of death
  - It makes sense, too, because the ancient Jews believed in a place called Sheol, the grave, a place of rest but also no worship or praise or activity – this is the point at which the faithful of all ages come into God's presence, and all who die now go into God's presence in heaven as well
  - It also makes sense that the saints are blessed – the second death won't have any power over them – the second death will be discussed in the next passage, but it won't apply to the faithful, who live with God in heaven even now as they await the final resurrection where all who believe will be given permanent bodies
- We might ask, why is this passage so fraught with issues? Are we really moving back in time with this passage and hearing a part of the story late? Why is the millennium not further explained? Why would the saints coming alive in heaven but without physical bodies be called a resurrection? Is John just messing with us?

- First thought: *God gives us glimpses of the wonderful realities of His Kingdom, but not to the detriment of our living for Him here and now.*
  - There are already a gazillion books trying to sort out the timing of the millennium – books that hinge all of their expectations for the future on one Scripture passage that God has left mysterious by not bringing it to light in other Scripture
  - There is absolutely a time in which Christ reigns alongside His saints who return to life as His priests – that much we know and God wants us to know – *that is all we can know*
  - It is meant to give us hope, that our hard work and sacrifices and hard knocks for Christ will be worth it – that is what the early church needed to hear, and what we need to hear
  - An obsession with times and dates can harm our dedication to the Lord – in Paul’s writings, some churches were so obsessed with the Lord’s coming that they’d stopped working, stopped living, just waiting – Paul said, “can’t do that”
  - We long for the day of Christ’s rule and reign over all things; we long to be with Him; we will enjoy whatever that looks like; let’s not obsess over details we aren’t given
- Second thought: *coming to life in God’s Kingdom is worth everything we face in this world.*
  - We have a lot to accomplish in this world; God has given us the privilege of spreading His gospel of salvation through Jesus; as Christians, we want to be open to the Holy Spirit so we grow in love, kindness, peace, patience, self-control – all the fruits of the Spirit – and we will face opposition to living for Jesus
  - But the prize is worth it! Whether we first live as souls in God’s presence before our bodies are resurrected, whether we are alive at Christ’s second coming and receive our bodily resurrection then, no matter what, what is to come will make our earthly sufferings seem insignificant
  - The church in every era needs to hear this, to be reminded not to give up the fight, not to give up the faith, that sin and death do not have the final word
- Last thought: *despite all the evil in the world, it is on a tight leash from God.*
  - Our last century has seen a great rise in great evil and wickedness, yet we have also seen evil defeated time and again
  - Evil is real; it must be addressed and dealt with through great prayer and reliance on God’s goodness to overcome
  - The doom of the great enemy of God and the church is certain, as we will see next week – all we must do is persevere