

# Premillennialism True or False?

## The Thousand Year Reign of Rev. 20

### Bible Answers About Denominations

The doctrine advocating the return of Jesus Christ to earth to establish an earthly kingdom over which He will reign for a 1000 years from Jerusalem is known as Premillennialism. This doctrine rests primarily upon the misunderstanding and misapplication of Revelation 20:1-7. While the entire Book of Revelation is difficult along with this passage some people read into the passage more than is there, and build a theory which is at variance with plain truth taught throughout the Bible.

Please notice first what is NOT mentioned in this passage that is so vital to the Premillennial theory: (1) Christ's second coming, (2) the establishment of a kingdom, (3) an earthly kingdom or reign on earth, (4) Christ sitting on David's throne, (5) the Jews return to Palestine, (6) a bodily resurrection, (7) Jerusalem or Palestine.

The general purpose of the book of Revelation was to set forth in symbolism the struggles and triumph of the early church in conflict with the Jewish and Roman persecuting powers. To be successful in understanding this text, we must bear in mind that we are dealing with an apocalypse in which truth relative to "things which must shortly come to pass" (Rev. 1:1; ch. 1:19; 4:1; 22:6) were signified to John (1:1). The persecutors are presented under the figures of beasts having many heads, horns, and tails. The persecutions are signified under the figures of famine, pestilence and the pouring out of vials of wrath upon the earth in the form of wars and disasters. These forces were unleashed against the church as the climax to the age long struggle between the Lord and Satan, between light and darkness. Just as God preserved a remnant of the seed of Abraham throughout the Old Testament in spite of all Satan could do to prevent the coming of the Lord, and even as Christ prevailed over all Satan could do to keep the kingdom from being established, even so the church/kingdom would come forth from the persecutions triumphant. Throughout all of the symbolism we can see that the victory belongs to God and His people and we receive the encouragement we need to persevere.

The binding of Satan is set forth in the first three verses of chapter 20. The angel is clearly acting by divine authority. He comes from heaven which is God's throne room and he is commissioned with divine power to lay hold on Satan and to bind him for a thousand years. This binding was to keep him from deceiving the nations. Jesus had discussed entering Satan's house, binding him and spoiling his goods (Matt. 12:29). This was to be accomplished by exercising His power over Satan in casting out demons. Remember, Christ was the seed of woman who in coming would bruise Satan's head (Gen. 3:15; cf. I Jno. 3:8). Satan has now been bound by the word of God and by what Jesus accomplished by means of His first coming. The Lord further bound Satan as He brought to an end the Jewish and pagan persecutions which hindered the church. Satan still has influence but those who serve him do so out of their own volition.

In the next three verses John envisions thrones and those who occupy them. Judgment powers are extended to the occupants on the throne. Notice John saw “the souls that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus” (cf. Rev. 6:9-11). He sees souls, not bodies. There is not a single word about a resurrection of bodies. These are the souls of they that had been beheaded. They are on the thrones because of their sincere dedication to God and their refusal to bow in submission to Satan’s efforts. They were under the altars crying out “how long, O Lord” (Rev. 6:9-11), but now they are on thrones and reigning with Christ now for a thousand years in heaven (not on earth) where Christ is (Heb. 1:3; 10:12; I Cor. 15:24). Their cause now flourishes. The doctrine of premillennialism says this living and reigning will take place on earth after Jesus comes back. But nothing is said about the coming of Jesus and nothing is said about these souls being on earth. They are reigning on thrones in heaven not on the earth. Therefore, there is no proof here for the premillennial doctrine of the reign of Christ on earth.

The first and second resurrections are not of two entirely different groups of people but of two entirely different events. The first resurrection is only for the saved who die in the Lord (Rev. 14:13). It enables them to sit on thrones and reign with Christ while earthly life continues on earth (Rev. 20:4-6). It is a spiritual resurrection. The second resurrection, though never actually called this, is for the saved and lost alike (Dan. 12:2; Jno. 5:28-29; Acts 24: 15). It enables them to stand before the judgment throne of God after the earth has “fled away” (Rev. 20:11-12). The “second death” which is mentioned here is symbolical of eternal separation, eternal punishment in the lake of fire. The martyrs who are pictured triumphant are blessed because they have passed the first death (physical), and the second death (eternal separation from God) has no jurisdiction over them. Their cause triumphs with them.

“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed” (Rev 20:5 NAS), refers to all other people who died; hence, the unbelieving dead— lived not until the thousand years were finished. When that period is finished, then there is a change. Then they enter “the second death.” In other words, they receive everlasting punishment; not only—as heretofore—for the soul but now also for the body. On the other hand, those who have part in the first resurrection--already explained—are blessed and holy. Over them the second death has no power. As priests of God and Christ they shall reign. The idea of reigning is dominant here just as the idea of binding is the prominent concept in the first three verses.

Satan shall be loosed out of his prison (vs 7-10) when the thousand years are finished. The thousand years represents the Christian age and not a literal period of time. Just when Satan appears to be forever bound, he breaks out in a new effort at deceiving the nations into lining up with him to persecute Christians. By means of the contrast between the “short time” (vs. 3) and the “thousand years,” we know that the duration of this period will be brief. The terms Gog and Magog are used to represent the nations and they recall ancient enemies of God’s people (Ezek. 38). The devil’s efforts are unsuccessful because “fire came down from heaven and devoured them” (Rev 20:9 NAS). It was not worldly power but heavenly power that finally brings to an end the evil work of Satan and his people. He is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone to suffer torment with all of the persecutors and unrighteous souls of all time, “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev 20:10 NAS). The forces of evil and the forces of good have met; the battle has been fought; the forces of good have won. God and His people are victorious having triumphed over Satan.

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