

STUDY 27
REVELATION CHAPTER 20
PART ONE

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ² He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³ and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

The Saints Reign with Christ 1,000 Years

⁴ And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Satanic Rebellion Crushed

⁷ Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea. ⁹ They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The Great White Throne Judgment

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened.

And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

We have arrived at one of the most difficult chapters to interpret in the book of Revelation. Eschatology is the field of Christian theology which concerns the study of the last things. It is the study of Christ's future return, the resurrection, the eternal blessedness of those who are redeemed, and the eternal punishment of those who are not. There is general agreement on these rudimentary points, but as to the way and when it all happens, there is wide diversity of thought and this has been the case since the very earliest centuries of the church.

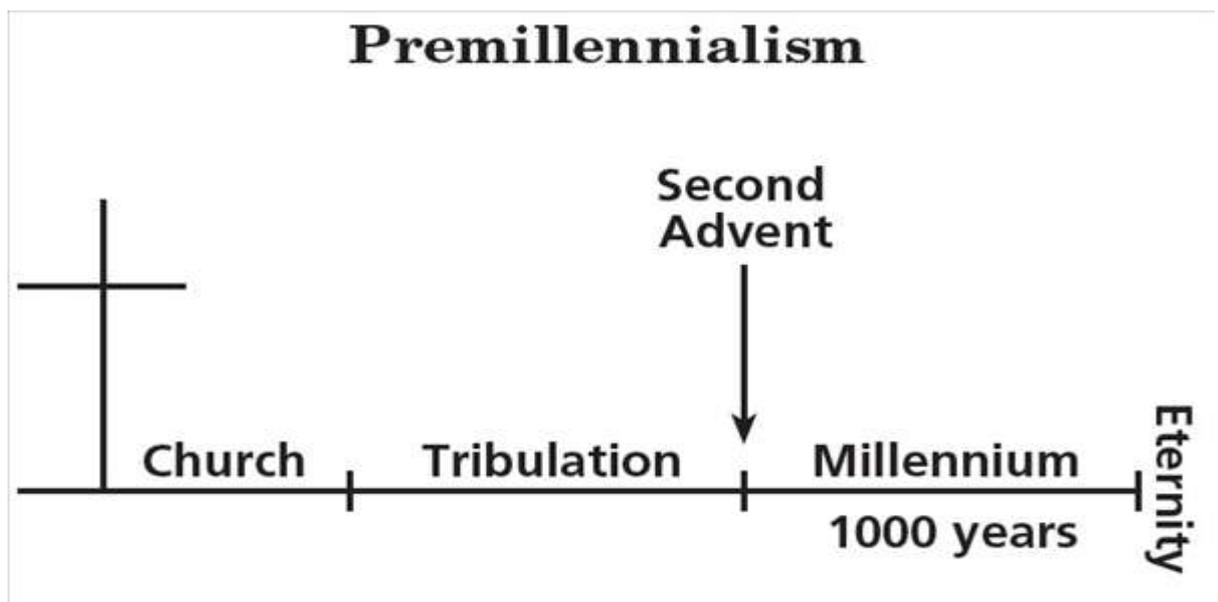
If we are to be serious Bible students, we should consider views which may not accord with ours, and indeed be prepared to change our views (or even admit we don't have a settled view) so long as such a matter does not go to the very essence of the doctrines of the faith. It is sad that there are Christians who are not even aware of different views and have slavishly followed all they have received without any proper consideration of their own. Now as to the basics of the Christian faith, these are foundational (as it were set in stone) but these matters we are about to consider are not vital for our salvation, nor indeed our sanctification. We must be dogmatic on the foundations of the faith and be prepared to battle for the truth. Here however we must be humble and look carefully at these matters, knowing that Christians have differed, and still do. Rather than consider the detail of the chapter verse by verse, may I ask you to read and re-read chapter 20 and glean its details from what follows, in part one of this study and part two to follow

First a definition, "The Millennium" refers to the period of a 1000 year reign of Christ mentioned in verses 1-4 above. The views promoted by theologians throughout history can be organised into three general systems and viewpoints which are known

as **Pre-Millennialism (historic and dispensational) Post Millennialism and A-Millennialism**. We will endeavour to look objectively at each viewpoint.

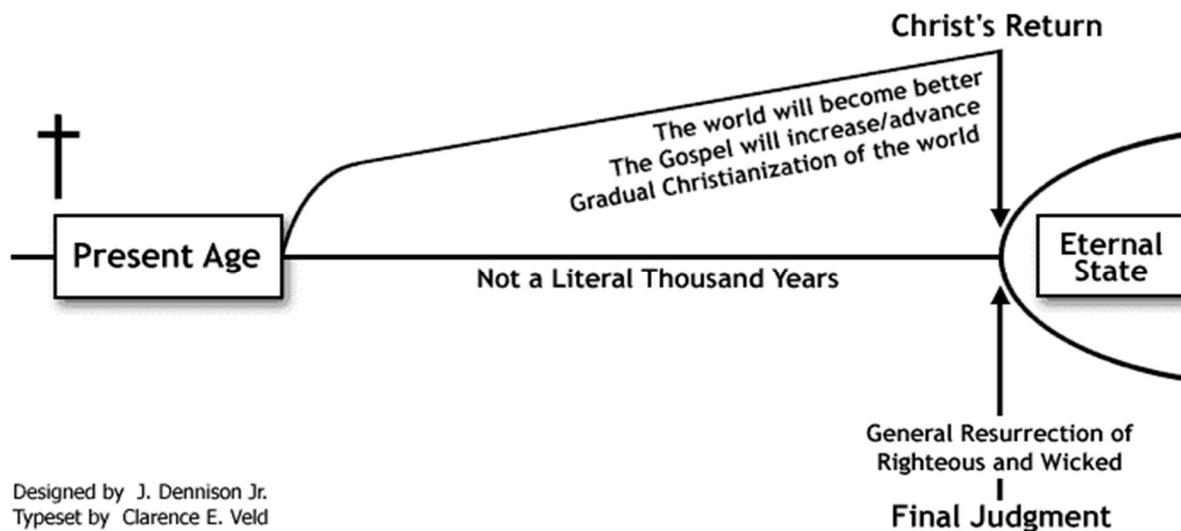
Pre-Millennialism (Historical)

Called historical because some of the early church fathers such as Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and Tertullian held this view. The view is that when Jesus returns he will establish his kingdom upon the earth for 1000 years, which maybe be literal or symbolic, in the sense of it being a long period of time. John talks about the Martyrs in chapter 20 and says of them that they came to life **“And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years”**. The verb used here means resurrection, indeed John uses the words (in relation to the Martyrs) **“first resurrection”** at the end of verse 5. Those who are resurrected first, are they say, believers and those brought back from the dead after 1000 years are unbelievers who then face the judgment. Most historic premillennialists hold that the nation of Israel will undergo a national salvation immediately before the millennium is established, but there will be no national restoration of Israel. Thus the nation of Israel will not have a special role or function distinct from the church. Please see the picture below



Post-Millennialism

The prefix “post” meaning of course “after”. This belief, which, may seem strange to some, is that Christ will come after the millennium. They believe in a literal kingdom of God upon the earth (maybe not a literal 1000 years) but it will not be established by the Lord Jesus coming to earth and issuing a 1000 year reign here. The gospel, they believe, will so transform society and Christianity will dominate the world which will herald the coming of Christ and His reign on the earth. They cite texts in which believers are commissioned to tell the good news to the ends of the earth. If the world is the mission field, then God must intend to save the great majority of the world so the argument runs (See Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; and Romans 1:16). In particular people who hold this view appeal to where John sees **“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands** (Revelation 7:9) They also point to the Messianic Psalms especially Psalm 2 particularly verse 7-9 **2 I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.⁸ Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession”**. A number of texts from Jesus and the apostles of course suggest the opposite (see Luke 18:8; Matthew 24; 3-31; 2 Thessalonians 2; 3-12; and Revelation 13). The actual course of history in the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st offers little encouragement that the gospel is transforming society. When Jesus comes there will be a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked and a final judgment and the eternal state ushered in. So the second coming is post millennium, in other words the second coming is the crowning of a golden age where things get better because of the influence of the gospel. This is not a widely held view and the biblical support is thin. Please see picture below



A-Millennialism

The prefix “a” meaning “no” that is to say a-millennialists expect no future millennial kingdom. They believe that there is no literal 1000 year kingdom of God and reign of Christ on the earth, but that the present church age in which we now live is the millennial reign of Christ. Many throughout the history of the church have held this view, and by time of Augustine it had become the dominant view of the church. It was the view of the reformers including Calvin and Luther. Christ will come back to the earth, there will be a general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked and the final judgment. The future kingdom foretold in Daniels prophecy (Chapters 2 and 7) is a spiritual kingdom and not a literal one on the earth for 1000 years. The 1000 years stands for a long period of time when the earth has the gospel preached. This they say began with the resurrection of Jesus and will last until the second coming. The kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus and his apostles are said to be synonymous with the millennial kingdom. The Martyrs, said to be resurrected, are those believers who are with Christ now (sometimes referred to as in “The intermediate state” **“absent from the body present with the lord”** 2 Corinthians 5:8) and the dead raised are believers and unbelievers. Satan’s binding seems to usher in this 1000 year rule so when did that binding occur. They maintain that this is not a future event but has already occurred and though Satan’s influence over the

world seems great now, he is bound and limited in his ability to deceive the nations. The scriptures below are adduced to make this point

(a) Matthew 12:28-29 **“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.**

(b) John 12:31 **“Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out”**

(c) Colossians 2:15 **“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it”**

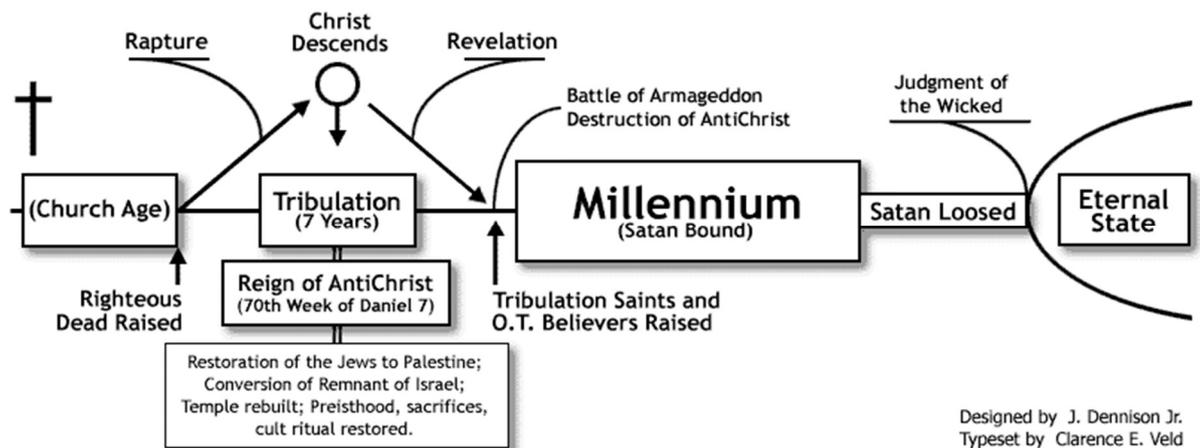
(d) Hebrews 2:14-15 **“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”**

(e) 1 John 3:8 **He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil”**



Dispensational Premillennialism

Born in the nineteenth century this view is that the church will be snatched to heaven (the rapture) before a coming seven year tribulation period. We have already covered the tribulation in our study that is the activity of the antichrist and the pouring out on the earth of the wrath of God. They hold that after the rapture and the expiry of the seven year period, Christ will return and reign on the earth. Dispensational premillennialists put a lot more stress on national Israel than historic premillennialists. Once the church has been raptured God will begin to work with the nation of Israel as in the days of the old covenant. The Jews will preach the gospel and many Jews and Gentiles will come to faith in Christ before He returns. God will literally fulfil all the promises he made to Israel in the Old Testament in the millennium, and the nation will reign throughout the earth. These views are generally held by who I call the “left behind” folks in particular authors such as Tim LaHaye



At the end of our study in Revelation I will endeavour to cover this particular view in more detail.

It's so easy to get confused when reading Revelation 20 and perhaps there is some merit in the description (not Biblical) of being “Pan-millennialist” that is to say it will all pan out in the end.