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Sermon Notes

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The Thousand Years

Revelation 20:1-10

After the Second Coming of Christ, one of two things will happen. Either Christ will set up a thousand-year kingdom in which Satan is bound, righteousness and blessings flourish, people will experience lavishly blessed healthy and successful lives with Christ physically reigning on earth, but in which there will still be birth and death, and there will still be sin in the hearts of the people, and which will end in ONE MORE BATTLE with Satan and sinfully rebellious people, resulting in the eternal state I am about to describe

OR

Christ will judge all his enemies at once at the time of his Second Coming, sending Satan, demons and all the reprobate – the unbelievers – into the lake of fire and the righteous will be glorified in resurrection bodies with no internal sin and no possibility of a future fall... in a perfect world in which there is not the slightest hint of decay – the New Heavens and New Earth... the ETERNAL STATE

In other words, after the Second Coming of Christ, there either it will be a MILLENNIAL KINGDOM leading to the ETERNAL STATE... or the ETERNAL STATE will come immediately.

And dear friends, I don't know which of the two I believe.

I have studied the question of the millennium for years... BTW the word "millennium" comes from the Latin meaning "thousand years"

The idea of Christ reigning physically on earth in a wonderfully blessed world surrounded by the redeemed from every nation on earth is not at stake... BOTH OF THESE SCENARIOS include that! If we really believe in not just a New Heavens but also a New Earth, then any Old Testament picture of a radiantly blessed and fruitful world in which we are physically laboring and bringing forth rich blessings from the earth will be fulfilled in that future glorious world...

The essence of the millennium is not that... BOTH PHASES of God's coming Kingdom have that... the issue with the millennium is a greatly ENHANCED and BLESSED world that still includes birth, sin, and death. That is the difference between the millennium and the eternal state...

The difference between the millennium and NOW is:

- 1) NOW Christ is physically in heaven, where he ascended and is sitting on the right hand of God... though we have not seen him, we love him... and though we do not see him now, we believe in him and are filled with hope" (1 Peter 1)... NOW Christ rules his invisible spiritual Kingdom by the work of the Holy Spirit; in the millennial kingdom, Christ will be reigning physically on earth, settling disputes among the nations, causing people to live at peace with each other; 2) NOW Satan is roaming the earth with his demons, continually tempting us to sin... in the millennium, he will be locked up in a prison, unable to deceive the world; 3) NOW the world system Satan set up is continually alluring us to sin; in the millennium, that will not exist; 4) NOW the world is groaning in bondage to decay and corruption and a cycle of death; in the millennium, the effects of Adam's sin will be greatly reduced, though not totally removed; 5) NOW the work we do is cursed because of Adam, producing thorns and thistles and heartbreak; in the millennium, the labor we do is lavishly blessed and fruitful, producing deep satisfaction, though not perfection; 6) NOW our bodies are wracked with pain, sickness and all of us will die, probably on average by age 80; in the millennium, pain and sickness are reduced, people are more robustly healthy, and

death is deferred much later, though not entirely removed... people will still die, but on average, they will die at a much later age than now.

Where do I get the idea that there will be a millennial reign of Christ on earth? Revelation 20:1-10. Where do I get the ideas I just shared of what that millennial life will be like? Isaiah 65:17-25 and other visionary passages from the Old Testament prophets.

So why do I say that I don't know if this will even happen? It's because of the difficulty of interpreting Revelation 20:1-10 in detail, and of trying to find a clear description of millennial life in those Old Testament prophets that CANNOT be referring to the NEW EARTH or to a symbolic description of the blessings of the New Covenant, the spread of the gospel

[In other words, if you find a passage which describes lavish agricultural blessings on a previously barren land in Isaiah, it may be referring to 1) the blessings of SALVATION by faith in Christ or 2) the blessings of the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonian exile or 3) the blessings of life in the millennial kingdom or 4) the blessings of the ETERNAL STATE, the New Earth]

Like this;

Isaiah 44:3-4 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. ⁴ They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.

Is Isaiah talking about God literally turning a desert into a paradise, or is he speaking of the effects of the outpoured Holy Spirit on people who repent and turn to Christ?

Whole books have been written about the Millennium... this topic has been hotly debated throughout church history... Augustine debated with the millennialists of his day... so did Calvin and Luther... Jonathan Edwards, following the Calvinist and Augustinian pattern, spiritualized the millennium and saw it as the spread of the gospel and the overcoming of the false teaching of Rome

In my life, I have gone back and forth on this topic so often I can't recall how often I've changed my views... unlike any other topic in theology, the more carefully I study it, the more questions the details seem to raise

In 2002, I was sitting with a good friend of mine, Tom Schreiner, at the Southern Baptist Convention. He is a Professor of New Testament at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, and one of the leading NT scholars in the world. We got to talking about the millennium. I was still trying to work out my views at the time, but was leaning toward amillennialism... the view that the thousand years described in Revelation 20 is just going back over the history of the spread of the gospel in visionary language. (I'll talk more about that in a moment)... He said he was a premillennialist (the word "pre" means "before," referring to the Second Coming of Christ happening BEFORE the millennium). I said why... he said because of the apparently SEQUENTIAL layout of the Book of Revelation, especially chapters 19, 20, 21-22... Revelation 19 describes clearly the second coming, Revelation 20:1-10 the millennium; Revelation 20:11-15 the final judgment, and Revelation 21-22 the New Heaven and New Earth.

Well, that made sense to me... and for the next fifteen years or so, I was a premillennialist... believing in the literal thousand year reign of Christ on earth AFTER the Second Coming before the final judgment and the New Heaven and New Earth

Well, in the course of time, I was asked to write a commentary on the Book of Isaiah... and I came to Isaiah 65:17-25, which has a perplexing vision...

Isaiah 65:17-25 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. ¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. ²⁰ "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. ²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. ²³ They will not toil in vain or

bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. ²⁴ Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. ²⁵ The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.

If life in the millennium is described anywhere in the Bible, it is described there.

Why? Because it is language of such rich, lavish blessing such as has never been seen in Israel or anywhere on planet earth... YET it includes BIRTH (for it speaks of infants being born) and DEATH (for it speaks of people who die before the age of 100 being considered accursed). That's the essence of the millennium. BUT the problem is that, in the text, God says "Behold, I will create a NEW HEAVENS and NEW EARTH... and then describes birth and death!!!

So, I called my friend, Tom Schreiner, to help me think through this aspect of the millennium... and he shocked me! He said, "Andy, I have changed my views. I am no longer premillennial, but amillennial." I could have dropped the phone!

And I have here a very carefully written book by an excellent evangelical scholar named Sam Storms.... The book is called *Kingdom Come*... and he argues that the amillennial view is the most biblically accurate... he says the thousand year reign of Christ is nowhere taught in the writings of Paul, of John, or of Peter... but actually many assertions in the New Testament flatly contradict the idea of a millennial reign of Christ on earth. On the back, the first endorser is... TOM SCHREINER!! He writes:

"For some, premillennialism is virtually equivalent to orthodoxy. Sam Storms challenges such a premise with a vigorous defense of amillennialism.... A powerful case for an amillennial reading."

WOW!

How will we figure all this out?

The best way to approach this is to ask, "What does the scripture say?" (Romans 4:3) And since the thousand years is only taught or even mentioned here in Revelation 20, that is the best place to start.

The problems come when we try to ask practical questions about what these words actually mean and how they harmonize with other themes in the Bible... that's where all the trouble comes.

Before we start walking through the text, let me say that IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER what you think about the millennium... if you actually believe in an ETERNAL STATE in which there will be a physical NEW EARTH and we will be in RESURRECTION BODIES doing blessed work, believing or not believing that there will be a temporary reign of Christ before that will not affect your pursuit of holiness or your spreading of the gospel of Christ.

Now... let's walk through the text

Beginning with the context:

Revelation is a book about the future... it is also a book about the invisible spiritual world... the word "revelation" means "unveiling"... and what is unveiled is BOTH the invisible spiritual world (of God on his throne, of Christ reigning invisibly but powerfully, of Satan hating the people of God, of demons and angels)... that invisible world, AND the future world... events that will transpire in the years, months, days, and even hours before Christ returns... and then the eternity that will happen after Christ returns

In the present, God is on a heavenly throne, surrounded by other thrones, served by 100 million angels, with Christ ruling with him... a Lamb that was slain

In the present, we have an invisible foe, Satan, that ancient serpent... Revelation 12 depicts him as a powerful dragon leading a demonic horde to attack the people of God

The Book of Revelation also depicts the FUTURE, the end of the world under the judgment of God

Revelation 5... the scroll

Revelation 6... the seven seals broken open

Revelation 7... a multitude from every tribe

Revelation 8-9... the seven trumpet judgments

Revelation 12... the dragon (Satan) attacking the people of God

Revelation 13... the beast from the sea (Antichrist) given power to rule the world; the beast from the earth (the false prophet) causing people to worship the Antichrist as god... the organized, systematic persecution of the people of God... and the deception of the whole world to the end that they worship a man and bow down to an idol

Revelation 16... the seven bowls poured out, the final judgments

Revelation 17-18... Babylon the Great, the world system of evil and persecution, exposed

The final battle, Armageddon:

Revelation 12:17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring-- those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 16:12-16 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. ¹³ Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴ They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. ¹⁵ "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." ¹⁶ Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Revelation 17:12-14 "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. ¹³ They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings-- and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

Revelation 19:19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army.

This is the setting of the Second Coming... the Antichrist, moved by Satan's hatred for Christ and his people, organizes the kings of the earth to one purpose, to assemble a massive army to slaughter once and for all the people of God, the Jews, who have now at last turned to Christ, their Messiah, their King, their Savior, their God

Antichrist, insanely jealous for his status as the god of this world wants these people killed once and for all. They are mostly living in Israel, so he will move out on them to kill them there... but though they have their own plans and purposes, God has his and is working in their hearts, using their hatred and pride, so that they can be slaughtered all at once by the awesome coming King... Jesus Christ:

Revelation 17:17 For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled.

This is the setting for the Second Coming of Christ, which we covered last week:

Revelation 19:11-21 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. ¹⁷ ¶ And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, ¹⁸ so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." ¹⁹ Then I saw the beast and the

kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰ But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. ²¹ The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

This brings us to this morning's text:

I. The Binding of Satan (vs. 1-3)

A. The Millennium Starts with the Binding of Satan

Revelation 20:1-3 *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³ 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.*

1. The chapter opens with a powerful action, the binding of Satan
2. The one who does the binding here is a single angel coming down out of heaven
3. He has a key to the Abyss... he is in charge of that place of torture and imprisonment
 - a. The word "abyss" means literally "bottomless"... a pit of punishment for fallen angels called demons
 - b. We saw it earlier:

Revelation 9:1-3 *The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. ² When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose*

from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. ³ And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.

Satan is identified as the king over the Abyss:

Revelation 9:11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.

c. It is mentioned by Jude and Peter

2 Peter 2:4 God didn't spare the angels who sinned, but threw them down into Tartarus and delivered them to be kept in chains of darkness until judgment

Jude 1:6 the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home-- these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.

d. So, some particularly wicked and dangerous demons were thrown there by God to be held until they should be let out for a short time when the fifth trumpet was sounded

e. Demons in Jesus' day were terrified that he would send them there... like the Legion of demons that had entered the man in the Gadarenes

Luke 8:30-31 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. ³¹ And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

4. Satan is SEIZED by this angel with the commission from God, bound with a great chain and thrown into the Abyss

B. The Binding of Satan by Jesus

1. Jesus was driving out demons with a word, showing his irresistible power

2. Jesus' enemies, the scribes and Pharisees and other unbelieving Jewish leaders said he was a deceiver and was actually driving out demons by the power of Satan

3. Jesus said

Matthew 12:29 how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.

Luke 11:21-23 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²² But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils. ²³ "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.

4. Basically, Jesus depicts the advance of his gospel and the rescuing of lost sinners as an act of violence against Satan; and he specifically does speak of BINDING the strong man so that people can be rescued from his dark kingdom
5. This idea of the “binding of the strong man” for the spread of the gospel is a CENTERPIECE of the amillennial argument
6. They say that is EXACTLY what this thousand years is... the restriction of Satan’s power to deceive people from believing in Christ
7. Christ has been building his Kingdom with LIVING STONES rescued from Satan’s dark kingdom for TWO THOUSAND YEARS

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Colossians 1:13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves

C. The Purpose and Result of this Binding

1. The text is plain concerning God’s purpose and the result of Satan’s binding

Revelation 20:3 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.

2. The deception of the nations is the essence of Satan's power and reign... he LIES to human beings, leading them to sin and to condemnation under the laws of God

Genesis 3:13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

John 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies

3. Satan deceives every generation with the LUST OF THE EYES, LUST OF THE FLESH, BOASTFUL PRIDE OF LIFE
4. Satan deceives everyone who ever sins, alluring them with subtle and powerful temptations
5. The greatest deception he will ever work will be in the final years, deceiving the nations to receive the mark of the Beast and worship a man as god

***Revelation 13:13-14 And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.
¹⁴ Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.***

6. If there is a literal millennium, the people who live on the earth at that time will have to come to faith in Christ like all of us did... but they will have the great advantage of not having to fight Satan or an evil world system in order to do it
 - a. There will be no persecuting governments... or probably any organized systematic persecution of any sort
 - b. It's hard to imagine any world religions competing with Christianity in the millennium

- c. But that doesn't mean that every single person on the face of the earth will be a believer... just that the gospel will be perfectly unhindered
- d. All that will be left in those days will be the flesh... the indwelling sin nature
- e. More on that in a moment

D. The "Thousand Years" and Other Numbers

- 1. This binding is specifically for a thousand years
- 2. The phrase "thousand years" appears three times in the Bible other than in this chapter... and it always means just a very long time:

2 Peter 3:8 With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

- 3. But the phrase is used SIX TIMES in this chapter, once in each of the next six verses... once in verse 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7
- 4. Like other numbers in Revelation, it seems to have a symbolic aspect... 10 times 10 times 10...
- 5. But that doesn't mean it shouldn't be taken literally

E. How "Bound" Is Satan? Is He Bound NOW?

- 1. The crux of the matter between those who believe in a literal thousand years and those who don't: IS SATAN BOUND NOW?
- 2. Amillennialists say Satan is bound specifically now from deceiving the ELECT of the nations... those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world are protected from Satan's deceptions and are able to believe in Christ... Satan is bound whenever the gospel actually wins a lost soul to Christ
- 3. This chapter thus refers to the powerful spread of the gospel over the entire church age
- 4. Premillennialists answer saying HOW IS SATAN BOUND??

- a. The binding described here seems extreme, absolutely restraining Satan from any deceiving activity whatsoever!
- b. He is locked away, thrown into a pit... not merely blocked or answered or thwarted from winning a debate
- c. He doesn't deceive ANYBODY when he is thrown into the Abyss
- d. In what sense is Satan bound with a great chain and thrown into the Abyss when an evangelist preaches and someone repents and comes to Christ?
- e. Especially when Satan seems so free:

1 Peter 5:8-9 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

- f. Paul continually battles Satan, and seems even to lose some people to Satan

1 Corinthians 5:5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 2:11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

- 5. Satan now is usually spoken of as more BLOCKED than BOUND:

Job 1:10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?"

F. What About Demons?

- 1. A practical question for premillennialists is "Are Satan's demons also bound with him and thrown into the Abyss for the thousand years?"

2. One might argue that the word “Satan” includes all of his angels, since the devil and his angels will be thrown together into the Lake of Fire

G. The Release of Satan

1. The release of Satan at the end of the thousand years

Revelation 20:3 After that, he must be set free for a short time.

2. Taught again in verse 7, the last mention of the thousand years

Revelation 20:7-8 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth

3. The release of Satan from being bound is a difficult verse for amillennialists... they generally speak of a time of great wickedness and deception at the end of the age, with no specifics
4. People who believe in a literal thousand year reign of Christ speak of a final phase of Christ’s war against Satan and his people that will happen at the end of those thousand years... more in a moment

II. The Millennial Reign (vs. 4-6)

If all we had were verses 1-3, the millennium would be far easier to understand

These next few verses (vs. 4-6) give details concerning saints who will reign with Christ for a thousand years... and these verses cause the most controversy

Amillennialists say these verses refer to martyrs who died during the entire church age, who ended up just fine... gloriously reigning with Christ IN HEAVEN... they argue that’s exactly what verse 4 says:

Revelation 20:4 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...

To amillennialists, this is just more detail about those who are absent from the body, present with the Lord... they are reigning in heaven with Christ; like the martyrs mentioned when the fifth seal was broken:

Revelation 6:9-11 *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. ¹⁰ They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" ¹¹ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.*

They argue that the phrase "come to life" refers not to bodily resurrection but to being born again, crossing over from death to life through faith in Christ... they were dead in sin, and came to life on earth... a spiritual resurrection:

Colossians 2:13 *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins*

John 5:24 *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.*

Premillennialists say these are actually raised from the dead in resurrection bodies and join with Christ in reigning physically on earth during the millennium

A. A (Somewhat) New Earth

1. The millennial kingdom: if it literally happens, Christ will have to FIX the smoldering planet earth... utterly ravaged and almost totally destroyed by God's trumpet and bowl judgments
2. BUT he is more than equal to the task

B. Walking through these Verses

1. Thrones for Judges (vs. 4)

Revelation 20:4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.

- a. These are positions of power for certain followers of Christ
- b. Jesus delegates his authority and empowers them to judge and to rule in his name

Revelation 3:21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

2 Timothy 2:11-12 Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him.

- c. We should expect this in our future lives in the eternal state... some of the redeemed given authority and power greater than others

Luke 19:17-19 "Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.' ¹⁸ "The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.' ¹⁹ "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'

2. Rulers Identified (vs. 4)

Revelation 20:4 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.

- a. There is a specific aspect of this verse that gives trouble to everyone...
- b. Why are the martyrs who were killed in a specific way (beheading) during a specific time (the years when the beast was reigning and when people were receiving the mark of the beast) WHY ARE THEY selected out from among all the servants of Christ in church history?

3. Rulers Honored for Courage

- a. Some believe these martyrs suffered more and showed more courage than anyone else in church history
- b. Despite the overwhelming pressure of Antichrist's government and the religion of the false prophet, despite the clear death penalty inflicted on those who refused to worship the beast or his idol, or to receive his mark, they **STOOD FIRM...** boldly proclaiming their faith in Christ
- c. They are therefore selected out for a special role in the millennial kingdom
- d. Others think that we should not limit it to just a subset of Christians, but that it represents all Christians who followed Christ in this world
- e. However, the number of the redeemed throughout church history is a number **SO GREAT THAT NO ONE CAN COUNT IT!**
- f. If Christ is literally going to empower these to reign and judge with him, he doesn't need several hundred million or one billion of them
- g. The more we suffer, the greater will be our honor in the next world!

4. Rulers Resurrected ("Came to life")

Revelation 20:4-6 They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ 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.

- a. These words have caused so much discussion and debate
- b. Their spiritual regeneration by believing in Christ is **POSSIBLY** in view here, and that **ALL CHRISTIANS** in some sense "reign with Christ" in heaven... that's what the amillennialists believe
- c. But if there will be a literal thousand year kingdom on earth, then these martyrs, **BEHEADED** for refusing to bow down, are

physically and literally RAISED TO LIFE in a RESURRECTION... we would not think of these as merely having come back to their original life, but that they are glorified in resurrection bodies

- d. Therein lies the rub!
 - e. Why would Christ give only some of the saints their resurrection bodies, and make the others wait for another thousand years?
 - f. Also, we can see the difficulty of mingling resurrected, glorified saints with not-yet resurrected or glorified saints (the believers of the millennial kingdom!)... a clearly UNEQUAL situation in which some of the Christians never sin or age or feel pain or die, and others are more normal and do sin, and do get sick, and do age, and do die
5. "Reigning With Christ"
- a. First, Christ himself will reign physically, obviously and clearly... in an earthly Kingdom, Zion, Jerusalem

Isaiah 2:3-5 The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁵ Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

- b. Christ will rule the world with a rod of iron... and judge with perfect justice

Isaiah 11:2-10 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- ³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down

with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ ¶ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

- c. And the chosen and resurrected saints will rule with him, extending his rule to the ends of the earth
- d. Who do they rule over?
- e. Who do they judge?
- f. The idea is that the Second Coming of Christ does not result in all his enemies being slaughtered, but some of them given a chance to repent and follow the true King of the world
- g. Many of them do, some do not
- h. So also genuine followers in Christ who were holding out for him at his Second Coming will have been rescued and survived Second Coming but were not martyrs... they continue in their normal physical lives and have children
- i. The children of both sets of people will have to be evangelized like anyone else
- j. Over the course of the thousand years, there will be quite a population on the millennial earth
- k. There will be commerce, worship, service... NO WARFARE

Isaiah 19:23-25 In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. ²⁴ ¶ In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. ²⁵ The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed

be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."

Zechariah 14:16-18 *Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. ¹⁷ If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain. ¹⁸ If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The LORD will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.*

6. The Rest of the Dead

Revelation 20:5 *(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.)*

- a. In the amillennial view, this represents the unbelievers, the non-elect, who are raised from their tombs at the end of the world for WRATH and JUDGMENT
- b. In the premillennial view, this represents the saints who weren't martyrs during the time of the antichrist... they were absent from the body, present with the Lord in heaven for the thousand years and receive their resurrection bodies after the millennium

7. The First Resurrection

Revelation 20:5-6 *This is the first resurrection. ⁶ 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.*

8. The Second Death = hell

Revelation 20:14-15 *The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

9. Priests of God and of Christ

Revelation 20:6 *they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.*

- a. For the amillennialist, this just refers to the heavenly position of all true Christians... we are all priests in Christ= the “priesthood of all believers”
- b. For the millennialists, “Priests of God and of Christ” speaks of the millennial religion that these saints will help administer... as children of the survivors grow up in Christ, these resurrected glorified saints will help grow them in their walk with Christ

C. In Heaven or On Earth??

1. So again, the fundamental question in these verses is: are these people who are reigning with Christ doing so in heaven or on earth?
2. The amillennialist sees the whole thousand years as referring to the church age, and this a sense of the heavenly glory and joy of these saints after they die
3. The millennialist sees this as referring to literal rulership with Christ on earth by a select group of martyrs

III. Satan Loosed and Assembles a Wicked Army from the Earth (vs. 7-9)

Revelation 20:7-9 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth-- Gog and Magog-- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves.

A. The End of the Thousand Years

1. For the amillennialist,
 - a. this is speaking of the end of human history... the very time that we just have been studying in Revelation—through all the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls
 - b. The end of the church age, the end of the time in which the gospel has been making such progress

- c. When all that is done, there will be a time of apostasy, of falling away through the influence of the devil... (perhaps including a specific Antichrist)
 - d. Satan deceives the nations and gathers everyone for the final battle, Armageddon, as we've said
 - e. The amillennialist just sees the thousand years as the entire church age ending in a cataclysmic battle
2. For the millennialist: the end of the millennial reign of Christ on earth
 - a. Despite the amazingly blessed era of human history, a restoration of a kind of modified paradise on earth, there is still SIN residing in each non-glorified person
 - b. Also, as we've said, there will be non-believers... as astonishing as that may seem, despite the fact that the resurrected glorified Christ is reigning physically on planet earth and rendering perfectly just rulings and building and perfectly prosperous world, with NO SATANIC influence, no evil governments, no false religions, no allure to lusts, no persecution... there will STILL be many unbelievers ready to join Satan in one last rebellion

B. Satan's Last "Tour" of Deception

1. Satan is released and travels to and fro over the surface of the earth
2. God allows him freedom to roam, freedom to deceive
3. It is the final test of the human heart, and many FAIL IT MISERABLY
4. Satan goes to the ends of the earth and recruits people to defy Christ and attack the earthly holy city where he rules
5. The phrase "Gog and Magog" come from Ezekiel 38-39... there are a tremendous number of details that Revelation has employed from Ezekiel 38-39

6. In Ezekiel, Gog and Magog refer to Gentile rulers from the most distant parts of the earth who assemble and invade Israel to destroy her
7. Here, these are just symbolic names to refer to the last vestiges of hostile unbelieving people from the distant parts of Christ's millennial earth who are ready to defy him and fight against him under Satan's leadership

C. Their Purpose: To Surround the Holy City and Defeat Christ the King

Revelation 20:8-9 to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves.

1. This may well be one of the most significant purposes of the millennial kingdom... to show how STUBBORN and REBELLIOUS the human heart is, how deep-rooted is our sin
2. After the most perfect era in the history of planet earth, people still HATE CHRIST and GOD and want to fight them

D. The Education We Always Wanted

1. Sin entered the world when Adam ate from the TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE of good AND EVIL
2. We asked for an education in evil... and redemptive history has shown it to us
3. In every single era of human history, sin has abounded more and more
4. God is in the business of DRAWING OUT sin and showing it to us in its ugliest light

Romans 5:20 The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more

5. Every stage of redemptive history has shown human sin, then God responding with more grace... then EVEN MORE SIN, and EVEN MORE GRACE in the next stage

- a. In the age before the flood, lawlessness increased so greatly that the hearts of people were ONLY EVIL ALL THE TIME
- b. So God sent a flood and raised up a godly man Noah, whose children were to populate the earth
- c. But Noah's descendants built the tower of Babel and were ungodly
- d. God raised up Abraham and began the Jewish nation... he poured out his grace to the Jews, so that through them all peoples on earth would be blessed
- e. God gave the Laws of Moses and the blessings of the Promised Land... but the Jews became as ungodly as the Canaanite nations; though God warned them again and again, their sins overwhelmed them and he exiled them
- f. Then God gave the greatest gift of all: Jesus Christ, incarnate, born of the Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life under the Law, did incredible signs and wonders... but the Jews were jealous and the Romans indifferent and zealous for their empire and they killed Jesus; but God raised him from the dead and he ascended to heaven and poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit, thus beginning the church age
- g. Over the last twenty centuries, the church age has unfolded... God has poured out so many blessings on us, but we are still weak and sinful... Romans 7 speaks of the POWER OF INDWELLING SIN,

Romans 7:15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

and the church has labored under our sinfulness and weakness while the gospel has gradually advanced... the end of that age was the greatest time of human sinfulness in history, under the Antichrist

- h. Then the millennial kingdom came... Christ actively ruling physically in the most blessed world one can imagine, and yet still the INDWELLING SIN and the seed of the unconverted

spreads like a cancer and Satan is able to rouse one more round of rebellion

- i. WHAT AN EDUCATION IN HOW WICKED AND STUBBORN SIN IS!!
- j. HOW INSANE, HOW IRRATIONAL sin is! To think we can defy God and fight him and try to conquer him and craft a world better than what he has willed!!
- k. Nothing less than the fullness of our salvation, including the final transformation of the human heart to being fully conformed to Christ will conquer sin

IV. Satan and His Army Finally Defeated... Forever! (vs. 9-10)

Revelation 20:7-9 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth-- Gog and Magog-- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

A. Satan's Army Defeated by Fire From Heaven

- 1. They are assembled... Satanically motivated
- 2. No mention of an Antichrist here... no one world ruler
- 3. There is so much we don't know
- 4. Amillennialists says this is just a recap of the final battle we already saw
- 5. But if not, this will be a quick final battle
- 6. The fire from heaven is like Sodom and Gomorrah... also a foretaste of hell

B. Satan's Final Punishment

Revelation 20:10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

1. At last, Satan gets what he truly deserves
2. All these centuries, he has been opposing God, hating God's people, deceiving, tempting, accusing, killing
3. The Lake of Fire was created for him and his demons... the Antichrist and false prophet share his torment
4. The fact that the Antichrist and False Prophet are already there, they had been thrown there already connects to the end of Revelation 19 and implies the thousand years and this final battle are NOT merely telling the same story again.

V. Applications

A. No One Sermon Can Settle this Debate

1. There are so many good arguments on both sides
2. I cannot finally resolve it in my mind... I have ready hundreds of pages in dozens of books on the Millennium and oddly, the more I study, the harder the problem gets
3. Sam Storms makes a very weighty case from the epistles of Peter, John, and Paul that the millennium is not in view and in some cases VERY DIFFICULT to harmonize with the clear texts; it is a problem that the millennium is not clearly mentioned in any other place in the Bible
4. Especially 1 Corinthians 15 and its account of the resurrection of the righteous, it's hard to harmonize with the millennium
5. Storms says we should not make a single reference in a difficult book the tail that wags the dog of all these other scriptures!
6. BUT just reading Revelation and the way its story unfolds, if we seek to be faithful to the details and connect them with a future

history, the millennium just seems like the next phase of God's redemptive plan after the Second Coming

B. Again... It Doesn't Really Matter

1. God has set before us TWO JOURNEYS... the internal journey of holiness and the external journey of gospel advance
2. This week, he wants you to make progress in EACH... put sin to death by the Spirit... repent of known patterns of sin... grow in your prayer life... love your family... serve your neighbors... bless the poor and needy... pray for your elected officials... raise your children in the gospel... work hard for the glory of God in your job... find some lost person at work or in your daily life and share the gospel with that person... send an encouraging email to an FBC missionary serving overseas
3. No matter what you believe about the millennium, you can and should do ALL of these kinds of things!!

C. Study Anyway!

1. God wants us to treasure everything we read in scripture and not ignore any of it or slight any of it

D. See the Stubbornness of Sin... and that the ONLY REMEDY is the Grace of God in Christ!

E. Come to Christ!!

1. The most important thing for you is forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ!!
2. If you don't know Christ as Savior, come NOW while there's time!