

When most of us read the Book of Revelation, one of our **main** interests (of course), is to gain an understanding, of just how the second coming of Jesus is all going to unfold... And ch20 of Revelation, and how we **interpret** ch20, will have an **enormous** bearing on what conclusions we come to, about this whole process.

And I'm going to start out today, by saying that no matter how I explain this Rev 20, I reckon it's pretty much guaranteed that at least ½ the people who listen to this message (whether they be sitting in the pew, or whether they're watching the video at home, or whether they're listening to it from a podcast), I reckon I can pretty much guarantee, that at least half the people listening, are going to disagree with what I say (no matter which way I interpret it).... And that's OK.

There will also be those who are so **sure** of themselves and so sure of their **own** interpretation, that if anybody **ever** gives a **different** interpretation to what **they** believe, then they will view that other person as "Somebody who obviously doesn't believe the Bible", and they will brand them as a 'heretic' or a 'false teacher'... That's not OK.

...As I've researched today's topic, it hasn't really been a very big surprise to me, that Bible believing Christians, from all over the world, come to very different conclusions as to what chapter 20, and the millennium, is talking about. Well-known theologians – highly respected Bible teachers (Godly people) from all over the world, disagree on this.

And as I've researched this, at times I've felt a deep sadness, at the venom and character assassination that (at times) are

expressed by people who reckon they've got all the answers, and anybody who disagrees with them, is a tool of the devil...

So, I want to begin today by saying, that it's very important for us to understand, that Rev ch20, and our understanding of the Millennium, is **not** an issue on which our faith stands or falls... There are **some** things in the Christian faith, that it's OK to disagree on, and this is one of them.

There are **some** things, that are '**not** negotiables' – Like:

- who the person of Jesus Christ is;
- the Trinitarian nature of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)
- the fallen and sinful state of humanity, and our need of a saviour;
- the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross;
- His resurrection and ascension;
- The belief that Jesus is returning again,
- And that the disciples of Jesus Christ, will be bodily raised from the dead
- That there will be a new heaven and a new earth,
- And we will spend an eternity in glory with Christ

These things, are a given – these things we are agreed upon – there's nothing to negotiate...

But **somewhere** in amongst all this, there is this thing called "a millennium" – 1000 years... And chapter 20 of Revelation, is the only mention that we find of this millennium in the entire Bible... And it depends on how we interpret the book of Revelation, how we interpret the millennium...

So, please don't ever go ripping each other to shreds, just because you hold a different view of the Millennium... And

more to the point, can you give me a break, hey... (I'm just a simple country preacher, who with the help of God, is doing the best he can, to help the people of God, to understand God's word). I am not infallible. And nor is any other Bible teacher. And I acknowledge, that on this matter, the position I've come to, **could** be wrong – I don't think it is, but it could be. And if when Jesus returns, I find that I was wrong about the sequence of events, well I'm quite willing to change my theology mid-flight...

Righto,

I'm going to begin today, by giving a brief overview, of the three main interpretations of what this "Millennium" is. Within each of the three categories, then, there is a multitude of variations of the theme, but I'm not going to describe all of the variations. I'm just going to give a brief overview of the three **main** categories, under which **many** variations exist.

And then I'm going to share a bit deeper from the Scriptures, as I believe The Lord has helped me to come to understand it.

The word "millennium", means "1000 years". *We know this – we became very well acquainted with this word during the approach of the year 2000, or was it the year 2001??? But when our calendars clicked over, planes **didn't** fall out of the sky, our bank accounts **didn't** go back to Pounds, shillings and pence, and life-support systems didn't shut down – the Y2K bug ended up being one giant, expensive scare-campaign... But at least we know what a millennium is – 1000 years.*

And in terms of the **Biblical** millennium, some see this as a 'literal' 1000 years, and others see it as a symbol, representing "a significant, (but undefined) period of time".

The three main categories of interpretations of Rev 20 have become known as:

- Post-millennial;
- Pre-millennial; and
- A-millennial

And the pre; post; and A, all refer to when we expect Jesus to return, in relation to the millennium.

OK, at this point, I reckon we'll have our Bible Reading, and then we'll discuss the 3 different positions.

20 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and

reigned with Christ for 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 is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷ And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books,

according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

1. Post-Millennial

OK, let's begin with the Postmillennials. The **Post-millennialists** believe that Jesus will come, **after** the Millennium. They believe that some time after AD70 (And AD70, is a significant date – this is the date at which Rome obliterated Jerusalem. The Jewish temple was destroyed, and the sacrificial worship of YHWH was finished.)

Now, either at this point, or some point later in history, postmillennialists believe the 1000 years began (whether it be a literal 1000 years, or a long period of time). Satan is bound, he's not able to deceive the nations any longer, and (spiritually) Christ is beginning to rule on the earth. And as the gospel is preached, and peoples turn to Christ, all over the world, Christ is reigning on the earth – It's seen as 'the golden age', as the world turns to Christ, and even the world's culture, becomes Christianised.

Post-millennialists believe that when the Gospel is fully preached, and all, or most of the world have turned to Jesus – at the end of that millennium, Jesus will return; the dead will

be raised; He will judge the living and the dead; and He will inaugurate His new Kingdom with the new heavens and a new Earth.

Now, **most** people who hold a ‘post-millennial’ view, don’t seriously believe that Jesus’ return is imminent (at least, not in the terms of what we think of it as the ‘possible immediate future’) (*like, Jesus could come back before we get to eat the smoko that’s down the back*) (*That would mean that I wasted most of my week, writing this sermon*). You see, Postmillennialists can’t believe that Jesus is going to return before we get our smoko, because the Gospel hasn’t yet largely Christianised the whole world. And they also expect, that before Jesus returns, there will be a wholesale response by the Jews, turning **their** hearts to Jesus Christ, and this hasn’t happened yet...

Anyway, there’s not many post-millennialists around these days. It used to be a very popular interpretation, especially during the great missionary periods (1700’s, 1800’s), as the Gospel was taken to China, and the Pacific Islands, and deepest, darkest Africa, and South America... These missionaries, were fulfilling the great commission, to take the Gospel into the **whole** world. And as they did this, they believed they were also hastening the return of Jesus.

And we cannot downplay, the magnificent transformations that were being made in individual lives, and the transformations that were being made in entire cultures, as the Gospel was preached, and the Holy Spirit did His transformational work. You know, sometimes missionary enterprises of the past get a terrible rap – as “the destroyers of indigenous cultures”, but we must never forget, the most

wonderful gospel transformation that largely took warring tribal systems to god-fearing communities...

Postmillennialists believe that the millennium is the period in which the world is Christianised, and then Jesus will return.

2. Pre-Millennial

The second view, is what's known as the **pre-millennial** view, and I'll spend a bit more time explaining this one, because at the moment, this is the most popular view that we will hear getting preached on the Christian airwaves.

Premillennialists, believe that Jesus will return **before** the millennium.

So, at the end of ch19, which we studied last week:

- Jesus returns;
- Everybody against Christ is killed;
- The Antichrist and the False Prophet are dispatched to the Lake of Fire

And now in chapter 20:

- Satan is bound;
- The righteous are raised (not everybody – just the Christians.);
- And **then** the millennium begins.

Premillennialists expect there to be a 1000 year period, where Jesus is the King of the world (reigning physically, in this world), and Jesus and the resurrected Christians, will rule.

And then **after** 1000 years:

- Satan is released;
- He gathers the nations to war against Christ;
- But God burns them up; and
- And then everybody else is raised. – the wicked will be raised for the day of judgment.

Alright, so the **premillennialists** believe there is going to be 2 resurrections – one at the start of the millennium (when the righteous are raised), and 1000 years later, there will be a **second** resurrection, (when the wicked will be raised and judged, and dispatched to the lake of fire, along with Satan.).

Premillennialism, today, has become the most popular belief in evangelical and Pentecostal churches in The United States. In fact, in **some** circles, you would be thought of as ‘strange’, or you might be branded as ‘a liberal, who doesn’t believe the bible’, if you believe anything **other** than premillennialism.

Premillennialists will commonly claim that **their** interpretation, is the only literal interpretation one could have. They see the book of Revelation as a series of events, and it’s written in the **order** of the events, so therefore the 1000 year reign of Christ, must come after the events of chapter 19, when all the ungodly are killed and fed to the birds...

....

Many **very** well-known, and high-profile Bible teachers, are premillennialists. The likes of Chuck Missler; Charles Stanley; John Piper; Chuck Swindoll; Billy Graham¹, and numerous others, are all **premillennialists**... The “Left Behind” series of books and movies, which have greatly influenced a generation of Christians (it’s fiction by the way –

the “Left Behind” series), but they are all based on “premillennialism”...

So, why is premillennialism, so much more popular in the United States, than what it is in the rest of the world? It’s not so popular here in Australia, but it is becoming more and more popular, as we become more and more influenced by the preaching coming out of North America...

So, why **is** it so popular in the US? Well, it’s due largely, to the influence of something called, “Dispensational theology”. Dispensational theology comes from a Brethren background, but it’s been embraced (quite strongly) in United States. And the influence that Dispensational theology has had on the evangelical church community, has been immense – even those who don’t embrace dispensationalism in its entirety, can be greatly influenced by some of its teaching.

Does anybody here own a study bible? I have one, who else has one? It’s a Bible, that has a commentary, written down on the bottom of each of the pages. Who finds their Study Bible really useful? **I** find it really useful... But there **is** a danger, in using a study bible. The danger comes, when we begin to read the commentator’s notes on the bottom, and (over time) we begin to give the commentator’s notes, as much authority as the Scriptures themselves.

My study bible, is an NIV Study Bible. Who else here has an NIV study bible? They’re very useful, aren’t they?

Who here, has a Scofield Reference Bible? How about a Ryrie Study Bible?

No, of course you don't, because you're not from North America.

In 1909, what was probably the world's first study bible, called "the Scofield Reference Bible" was published. And for the first time, ordinary old Jo Blo, who hadn't done a lot of Bible study, could all of a sudden, understand even very complex and unclear bits of scripture – because the notes down the bottom, told him exactly what it meant.

"Sam Storms" says:

One cannot underestimate the influence of the Scofield Bible on the rank and file of average Christians throughout the country (USA). With the aid of the famous "Scofield Notes," the Bible suddenly became accessible to the average, moderately educated, Christian citizen. It became difficult for many to differentiate between the inspired text of Scripture and the interpretive notes at the bottom of the page.

And guess what Scofield taught in his reference bible....

- Dispensational theology
- Pretribulation rapture
- The premillennial coming of Christ

And the influence on a nation, was enormous.

And **now**, that influence of premillennialism, goes even beyond, dispensational theology. Not all premillennialists are dispensationalists; but all dispensationalists are premillennialists.

And because we now live in the age of celebrity preachers, and with technology (radio, television, internet), preaching from the United States, is being picked up now, all over the world. And most of these ‘big-name’ preachers, are teaching “premillennialism”.

Now, I’m going to put my cards on the table – “I’m not convinced by the premillennialism position”. To me, it seems that there are a few ‘gaping holes’ in premillennialism, so that biblically, it just doesn’t stack up.

Firstly, nowhere else in the New Testament, are we given **any hint** that:

- Jesus is going to come back twice; or
- that there’s going to be 2 separate resurrections; or
- that we’re going to get another opportunity to repent...

Everywhere else in the New Testament, it teaches us that when Jesus returns, that’s it – everything happens at that point-in-time. Jesus returns; the dead shall be raised – the righteous to eternal life – the wicked to judgment. – There will be no second chances.

Secondly, in Rev 20:7&8, the nations come out to battle against Christ, and “**their number is like the sand of the sea**”. And yet back in chapter 19, everyone but the Christians have been killed and fed to the birds. So, where does this innumerable multitude come from???

To me, the premillennial view, just doesn’t stack up... , which brings us to the third position?

3. A-Millennial (Realised Millennial)

The third method of interpretation, is the **amillennial** view.

“A” meaning “no”. It’s an unfortunate term that people use to describe it – it implies that **amillennials** believe there will be no millennium – that’s not true. A **better** term that sometimes gets used, is “**Realised** millennialism”.

Amillennial or **Realised** millennial, is a view which has traditionally been held by Lutherans; Roman Catholic; Anglican; Methodist; reformed churches; churches of Christ... Traditionally, it’s been the predominant view, but the weight is **now** shifting (as I said before), to the **premillennial** view.

The **Realised** millennium view (or **amillennium** view), sees it like this – we are **living in** the millennium. It’s not a literal 1000 years – it represents a significant, but undefined length of time:

Now, we’ve already discovered, that the Book of Revelation is what’s known as “Apocalyptic literature”. It’s a series of visions – it’s giving us a message through images. And we’ve **also** noticed, that as we read the book of Revelation, some of the events, get described, several times, in different ways.

And I’ve given this analogy so many times, my boys can almost quote this analogy word for word:

I’ve stolen Phillip Jenson’s analogy of the instant replay that we have with our sporting events ... In footy, somebody

*scores a spectacular try, and we don't only see it **once** on the TV – they show it 4; 5; 6 times, from different angles, shot with different cameras... Each time we're seeing something different, but it's recording the one event... And that's what we have in the book of Revelation...*

So, for example:

- In Rev 14, Babylon is fallen, and yet in Rev 16, Babylon is judged, And then in Rev 17 & 18 & 19, we see Babylon fall again. – it's an instant replay.
- In Rev 6, the sun became black as sackcloth, and the stars fall from the sky, But in Rev 8, the sun is darkened again. In Rev 9, it's darkened yet again. And yet, in Chapter 16, the Sun is still there.... – we're seeing instant replays – several visions, describing the one event.

The book of Revelation, is written down in the order that John saw the visions – you will notice that he began chapter 20 with the words “**Then I saw**” – it's a sequence of what he saw....

And so, Chapter 20, is an instant replay – it's another picture of the arrival of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the final battle, and the final judgment.

It's the same event that we saw in:

- Chapter 19, as Jesus returned for His bride. It's the same event in Chapter 19 as when Jesus defeated all those who stood against Him, including Antichrist and his False Prophet, and when all those who stood against Christ, became tucker for the birds.
- It's the same event that we've caught glimpses of, with the breaking of the 7th Seal in chapter 8; Trumpets 5, 6 &

7 in Chapter 9; and the Bowls of God's wrath in Chapters 15 & 16 – they're all different pictures, of the one event.

So, where does the Millennium fit in? The millennium is now.

In chapter 19, we've caught a glimpse, of the return of Jesus – He's returning for His bride. The church, in all of its purity and holiness, is presented to Jesus Christ, as His bride.

But what of the Martyrs? Are they going to miss out? What of the witnesses of Jesus, who have been killed? What of those who have been beheaded? What becomes of these? Even under the threat of death, they did **not** deny Jesus – they were faithful to the end – what of them???

Well Chapter 20, reveals to us, that Satan hasn't been able to cut **them** out of the equation – in fact, they're already with Christ – they're **already** ruling.

You see, it might **seem** that Satan has the upper hand:

- *Earlier this month, an Egyptian soldier, by the name of Joseph Reda Helmy, was beaten to death by officers of his own army, because he was a Christianⁱⁱ;*
- *In July, 7 Christian men were killed by Al-Shabaab militants in Kenyaⁱⁱⁱ*
- *In Iraq and Syria, ISIS have been giving Christians the choice, "Convert to Islam, or die."*

What of these? It might **seem** that Satan has the upper hand...

But no, Satan does **not** have the upper hand. Satan's power is limited – this is what we're learning in Chapter 20 – Satan is bound. He may be able to kill Christians, but what happens to them when they die? Well, what did John see in the Revelation? He saw the souls of the martyrs – They came to life, and reigned with Christ for 1000 years.

This is the first resurrection – those who are killed (for being witnesses for Jesus), are raised to life with Christ, in the heavenly realms.

Satan cannot defeat a Christian by killing them – they go straight to glory. Earlier on, we've caught this same image: In Chapter 6, those who had been slain for being witnesses for Jesus, were there in heaven, under the protection of the altar.

We are living in the millennium, now. Jesus is ruling from heaven, now.

When Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, His Spiritual reign began. In Rev 4 & 5, we caught an image of Jesus Christ (the Lamb of God), ruling from Heaven.

Right now, – Satan is bound – his power is limited.

You might say to me, “No, Michael. That's not true. We suffer the attacks of Satan all the time...” Yes, we do. For Satan to be bound, doesn't mean that he has **no** power – what it means, is that his power is **limited**, and he cannot do anything, that God doesn't allow him to do. God sets the boundaries to what Satan can do...

To get an idea of what it means for Satan to be bound, all we have to do, is see what he does when he's released, to do his worst.

And when God allows Satan to be released, Satan uses his power to get the nations of the world – to the ends of the earth (that's what Gog and Magog represent) – the nations to the end of the earth,, to turn against Christ, and against Christians, and to openly attempt to annihilate Christians, on a world scale...

Now, we've seen little glimpses of this in various countries (over time), but when Satan is loosed to do his worst, he's going to convince the nations (all over the world), to target Christians... Christians will become public enemy No.1.

This is what the great tribulation is going to be about. Do you remember back in chapter 12, when Satan was thrown down to earth, and he took his wrath out on Christians??? That's what Satan's going to do when his bonds are released...

So, for now, Satan is bound – his power is limited. Why???

God is restraining evil, to give every opportunity for the Gospel to be preached. Remember last week, we talked about how God sends out invitation after invitation for sinners to respond to the good news of the Gospel... Well, God is restraining the Devil, to give the Gospel every opportunity...

When God **removes** that restraint, all of a sudden, things are going to get really bad, and this will be the beginning, of the final end...

The nations will rise against Christ, and against His church, God will destroy His enemies, and the Devil will be thrown into the lake of fire.

At this point, I just want to share something with you...

When I was comparing all of the different views:

Postmillennial; Premillennial; Amillennial, ,, the only biblical barrier I had (for the amillennial view), was ^{Revelation} 20:10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were.....

And it seemed to me that this didn't line up with my understanding that Chapters 19 & 20 were describing the one event, because it makes it sound like the beast and the false prophet are already there, and then Satan gets sent there to join them... But then I realised that in the Greek, it doesn't say that at all.

In the Greek it says:

10 καὶ ὁ διάβολος ὁ πλανῶν αὐτοὺς ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θείου ὄπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης, καὶ βασανισθήσονται ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet.....

What's missing??? The word "were"...

To make our English translations flow, they've inserted the word "were", which isn't there in the Greek. John never wrote it. They could have just as easily have inserted the words "will be^{iv}", or "together with"...

And the New International Greek Testament Commentary says this:

*The devil is cast into the fire **together** with **or immediately after** his two fiendish allies.*

It's the one event. So, that mightn't mean anything to you, but it removed the one Biblical barrier that I could see.

Righto, I've gone on plenty long enough, so we'll cover vs 11-15 next week

But let's recap: What do we learn from what we've covered today?

1.

Well firstly, Jesus is indeed Lord. Satan may **seem** powerful, but he only has the power that God allows him.

2.

Secondly, Satan is bound. In Christ, we have the power and the authority, to overcome every deceitful scheme that the Devil tries to throw at us.

I'm reminded of when Jesus said to Peter, **Matthew 16:19** **I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,**

and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

If we act, as if Satan is a real threat to us, and that the Devil has a crippling power over us, then he will... But if in faith, we not only believe that Satan is bound, but we step out in confidence that he has no power over us (apart from that which God allows), then he will be bound.

As we take the love and the forgiveness, and loving mercy of God, out into the world – as we take the good news of Jesus, to a world that sorely needs to hear it, Satan is being bound all the tighter, and the Gospel is being released...

3.

Thirdly, we can have every confidence, that by standing firm to the end, as disciples of Jesus Christ – always being witnesses to Jesus – no man; no devil; no sword; no threat, can ever separate us from Christ...

4.

Fourthly, Jesus is coming. And in His power and glory, He will defeat Satan once and for all...

5.

And fifthly, Jesus return, can be at any moment.

We'll finish off Chapter 20 next week. Does anybody have any questions?

ⁱ <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/the-dispensational-premillennial-view-of-the-kingdom-of-god>

ⁱⁱ <https://vom.com.au/egypt-christian-soldier-beaten-death/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://vom.com.au/kenya-al-shabaab-militants-kill-seven-christian-men/>

^{iv} **10** The devil is again highlighted as the one who deceived the nations to attack the saints. His deceiving activities are mentioned again to show that he will undergo judgment because of such deception. He will be "cast

into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also the beast and false prophet [supply “are” or “will be cast”]” (see on 14:10 for the OT background of “fire and brimstone”). The devil is cast into the fire together with or immediately after his two fiendish allies. (Beale, G.K., 1999. *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.)