



The Last Word

A Bible Study on Revelation by Stan Key

SESSION 14. THE FINAL EXAM REVELATION 20:1–15

I. Three Views of the Millennium.

A. Few passages of Scripture are more hotly contested than Revelation 20:1–10. Passions run hot concerning the **order of events** described in this passage. Often the debate has turned bitter. The word “millennium” comes from the Latin *mille* (thousand) and *annus* (year). This is the only passage in the Bible that speaks specifically on this subject.

B. Some key questions to answer to establish your own position on this question include:

- Are the 1,000 years to be understood **literally** or figuratively?
- Is John talking about the **future** or the present?
- Who will be reigning with Christ and what will this look like?
- What is God’s purpose in this millennial reign?
- Does Revelation intend to map out a chronology of the end times or is the order of these events in the text unimportant?

C. Three basic views have been espoused:

1. **Pre-millennialism.** The prefix “pre” means that Christ will come back *before* the millennium. This view teaches that the present church age will end in a terrible time of great **tribulation** and suffering. Then Christ will return and establish a literal kingdom that will last 1,000 years where believers will reign with him on the earth. Christ will be physically present on earth during this time and Satan will be bound in the pit and thus have no influence. It will be a time of peace and many will turn to the Lord. At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan will be loosed and join forces with those who have been only nominal in their faith but inwardly have been seething in rebellion against Christ. This position takes Revelation 19:11–22:6 as a basic chronology of how the end-time events will unfold. The more persecution increases in the world the more this position grows in popularity.¹
2. **Post-millennialism.** This view believes that Christ will return *after* the millennium. This position believes that the progress of the gospel and the growth of the church will gradually increase so that more and more people will become Christians and society will be increasingly “christianized” until gradually the “millennial age” will emerge. Finally Christ will return at the end of this happy period. This is a very **optimistic** position that believes in the power of the Gospel to change the world. Many missionaries of the 18th and 19th centuries were of this persuasion. Think of the hymn *We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations*.

¹ Those holding this position are divided into those who are pre-trib and those who are post-trib. The former (most dispensationalists) believe that Christ will return not only before the millennium but before the Great Tribulation. Thus believers will be raptured first and not experience the times of trial coming on the earth for a 7-year period. At the end of the tribulation Christ will return with his saints to reign on the earth for 1,000 years.

- D. **A-millennialism.** This view sees the millennium in non-historical, non-literal terms. Revelation 20:1–10 thus describes the **present church age**. Those saints who have died are already now reigning with Christ in heaven. The millennium then is a heavenly reign. It is called a-millennial because it maintains there is no future 1,000 year reign yet to come. One thousand years is not a literal number but speaks of an unspecified, lengthy period of time. Thus, all future events spoken of in the Bible will occur more or less at once (return of Christ, one resurrection of everyone, final judgment, new heaven and new earth).
- E. This writer takes a basically pre-millennial position. However, he holds this belief humbly and without passionate intensity because:
- The **emphasis** of Scripture is not here (end time chronology).
 - The biblical data can be legitimately interpreted in different ways.
 - Frankly, he is not smart enough to figure it all out!

II. Four Final Realities (Revelation 20).

Before the new heaven and new earth can appear (chapters 21–22), four climactic events will occur.

A. Satan is bound (vv. 1–3).

After dealing with the beast and the false prophet (19:19–21), God now turns his attention to their leader—Satan.

1. The names by which he is called: the dragon, the **ancient serpent**, the devil, Satan (cf. Rev. 12:9).
2. An angel seizes Satan, binds him with a great chain and throws him into the abyss (the bottomless pit). Then the angel shuts the pit and seals it (locks it with a key) for 1,000 years. What a **fall** Satan has had! From heaven to earth (Rev. 12:9)... and now from earth into the bottomless pit.
3. But WHY? The purpose of Satan’s confinement is not to punish him but “so that he might not **deceive** the nations any longer” (v. 3). Thus, the millennium will be a time of unprecedented global evangelization. Satan’s influence and deceptive ways will be absent for 1,000 years. Thus if men rebel against God during this period, it will be obvious that the cause of their sin is the **stubborn and willful** human heart, not the devil.
4. Jesus said: No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds (same word as in Rev. 20:2) the strong man. Then he may plunder his house. (Mark 3:27). A post-millennial or a-millennial position sees this verse as referencing the binding of Satan as something that happened when Jesus came the **first time**. Though Satan’s influence is certainly not absent, the coming of Jesus has definitely put limits to what he can do in the world. A pre-millennial position teaches that after Christ establishes his reign on the earth, Satan’s influence will be rendered completely inactive for 1,000 years.

B. The millennial reign of Christ (vv. 4–6).

1. WHO will reign with Christ? Those seated on thrones and reigning with Christ appear to be a great host of **martyrs** (*those who have been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus*, v. 4). Elsewhere in Scripture we have indications that the saints will one day reign over the earth and participate in the final judgment (Matt. 19:28; I Cor. 6:2; Rev. 3:21).

2. WHERE are these thrones? The text is not specific but it appears to be on the earth.
 3. When the thousand years are ended, “the rest of the dead” will come to life. This is “the first resurrection.” These people are delivered from “the second death” (the lake of fire, v. 14) and will serve as priests and reign with Christ 1,000 years. (vv. 5–6).
 4. Pre-millennialists see these realities as literal events happening on the earth. Those who interpret the passage spiritually, may see the “first resurrection” as a way of referring to the **new birth**.
- C. Satan is released and defeated (vv. 7–10).
1. After 1,000 years, Satan is released “for a little while” (v. 3). Again he will **deceive** the nations, gathering Gog and Magog (symbolizing all the nations) and make war against the people of God and “the beloved city”. But before the battle is even fought, fire comes from heaven and consumes them all. Satan is then thrown into the lake of fire to be tormented forever.
 2. But WHY would God permit his archenemy to come back and again deceive the nations? Perhaps to expose the utter perversity of sin the **rebellious** nature of the human heart.
- D. The Last Judgment (vv. 11–15).
1. As the dead are standing before the great white throne, the books are opened in which are recorded the deeds we have done. Nothing is **omitted**, all is recorded. By their fruit you shall you know them. Also the book of life is opened.
 2. There is some question about who is seated on the throne: is it God the **Father** or God the **Son**? Verses can be gathered to support either claim. However, the unity of God makes it unnecessary to quibble over exactness in matters such as this.
 3. The dead are judged based on what they have done. “The dead” seems to refer to those who did not participate in the first resurrection (v. 6). Some mistakenly imagine that this passage implies “salvation by works.” No! It only underscores what is asserted over and over in the Bible: that our works **reveal** unmistakably what we believe and thus what our true relationship is with God. Salvation is by **faith alone**, but faith inevitably will be manifested by the works it produces.
 4. Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire. Here we see the **death of death!**
 5. Everyone whose name is not recorded in the book of life is also thrown into the lake of fire, which is described as the **second death**.
 6. Elsewhere the New Testament speaks of final judgment:
 - *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. (John 5:24–25).*
 - *For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God (Rom. 14:10).*

- *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (II Cor. 5:10).*

III. How Should We Then Live?

A. What happens when we die?

The Bible categorically rejects some answers to this question that people have proposed down through the centuries: annihilation, reincarnation, universalism, purgatory, etc. The Bible is clear: *It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (Heb. 9:27)*. This judgment will determine one of only two possible destinies for every human being: **heaven** or **hell**.

B. Anticipating the final judgment, should help us to live better today!

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live **holy** and godly lives as you **look forward** to the day of God and **speed** its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. (II Peter 3:10–13).*

Awareness of the final judgment helps me to:

1. Live in the hope that **justice** will finally be established in the earth.
 2. Find grace to **forgive** those who have hurt me. God will take care of my enemies so I don't have to.
 3. Find the power and ability to live in **holiness** and godliness today.
 4. Be more compelled to **evangelize** my neighbors.
- #### C. To prepare for our final examination:
1. Make sure you have a good **Lawyer**. I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate (lawyer) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (I John 2:1).
 2. **Repent** of your sins. If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment (I Cor. 11:31).
 3. Trust in the Lamb and his **finished work** on the cross. Trust in *his* good deeds not yours! *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1).*

*God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have **confidence** for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is **no fear** in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. (I John 4:16–18).*

TABLE TALK

1. Describe your own experience with trying to understand the chronology of end time events. What did you learn from this lesson about understanding the sequence of events?
2. Describe your feelings related to a literal, historical, physical millennial kingdom here on this earth.
3. When was the last time you heard a sermon on the Last Judgment? Why do you feel it is mentioned so rarely today?
4. Do you have confidence as you think about standing before the throne of Christ?
5. In the light of our Bible study, talk about the statement: *If you are born once then you will die twice but if you are born twice you will die only once.*