

“REVELATION: DOES IT DESCRIBE OUR DAYS?” SERIES

#3: “What I Believe About the Book of Revelation”

INTRO:

Through my years in the ministry, I have never been very strongly drawn to the book of Revelation. I’ve had an opinion about it for quite some time, but my view of it consisted more of what I *didn’t* believe about it than what I did.

I have never bought into the Dispensational Premillennial view that produced the “*Left Behind*” series. It seemed too much like something from the SyFy Channel for me to take it seriously, even though a number of my brothers and sisters in Christ and fellow preachers sincerely believed it and do now.

I also have never bought into the Post-Millennial view. I just can’t see this old world getting better and better until we usher in the kingdom of God. I don’t see that anywhere in John’s Revelation.

I can see the historical part of Historical Premillennialism. As a student of history, I see a lot of the events described in Revelation that I can identify as actual history – many of them that occurred before the end of the first century.

And while I can see some of the Preterist view, I just can’t believe that John was writing about such a limited period of time as the forty years from A.D. 30 when the church began and A.D. 70 when Jerusalem and the Jewish nation was destroyed.

So, after all these years, I have decided that the Amillennial view is the one I vote for as being closest to the true meaning of what John wrote. It allows for historical identification of past events and provides the best explanations for future events.

REASON NUMBER ONE: AMILLENNIALISM PRESENTS THE BEST OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

While Premillennialists view the book of Revelation as chronological, from chapter one through chapter twenty-two, which presents no small number of problems, Amillennialists believe that it’s cyclical, that is, it describes repeating sequences of events that grow in the power of their effects. This is called *Recapitulation*. Robert Lowery, in *Revelation’s Rhapsody*, College Press, 2006, describes it this way:

“The repeating cycles used in Revelation make it similar to a song with a repeating refrain that grows in volume.”

The seven trumpet judgments parallel the seven bowl judgments. They each describe the same event, but the seven bowl judgments reveal more intensity and a greater effect.

In other words, Revelation is a retelling of the history of the church, from beginning to end, over and over again.

Another way of saying this is that Amillennialists believe Revelation is presented in a form known as “parallelism,” in which events in the history of the church leading up to her victorious ending are presented several times (seven, to be exact), with each time being from a different perspective and featuring different actors. William Hendriksen, in his commentary on Revelation called *More Than Conquerors*, presents this “parallelism” in these seven sections of Revelation:

1. Chapters 1-3 (the church in the world)
2. Chapters 4-7 (the church’s trials and persecution)
3. Chapters 8-11 (the church avenged, protected, and victorious)
4. Chapters 12-14 (Christ opposed by the dragon [Satan] and his helpers)
5. Chapters 15-16 (final judgment upon those who refuse to repent)
6. Chapters 17-19 (the fall of Babylon and the beasts)
7. Chapters 20-22 (The dragon’s doom; Christ and the church victors)

REASON NUMBER TWO: AMILLENNIALISM HAS THE BEST EXPLANATION OF REVELATION 20.

In the first three verses of chapter 20, John wrote:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, 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.

Dispensational Premillennialists see this “binding” as literally as they view the thousand years.

Amillennialists see this “binding” as a restriction, but not a complete universal rendering of inability to function. This “binding” was accomplished when Christ began to perform miracles, raising the dead, casting out demons, and defeating Satan in the wilderness. When He died on the cross and was resurrected from the dead, Satan’s doom became inevitable. From then on, Satan was prevented from perpetuating the spiritual blindness of the nations and keeping them from hearing the gospel. He is also prevented from bringing about the battle of Armageddon prematurely.

Since the binding of Satan began during the ministry of Jesus, the **“thousand years”** is the lifespan of the church on the earth. It culminates in the coming of Christ, with the martyrs who have been reigning with Him, the church being raptured or lifted to meet Him in the air, and the resurrection of all the rest of the saints.

So, the **“thousand years”** is not taken literally. Amillennialism understands the one thousand years to be an inexact number, just as it is in a number of other Scriptures, including Psalm 50:10; Song of Solomon 4:4; Joshua 23:10; Isaiah 60:22; and 2nd Peter 3:8. To Amillennialists, the one thousand years is “a long period of time,”

and we are in it at this very moment. At the end of this church age, or millennium, Satan will be **“released for a little while”** (20:6). HAS THE TIME OF HIS RELEASE BEGUN? Inquiring minds want to know.

REASON NUMBER THREE: AMILLENNIALISTS HAVE A MORE SCRIPTURAL VIEW OF CHRIST’S SECOND COMING.

Dispensational Premillennialists believe that Jesus will come secretly to rapture believers, unrevealed to the rest of the world, then He comes back seven years later, after a **“tribulation”** period, to lead the saintly armies in the Battle of Armageddon and set up His millennial kingdom, reigning from Jerusalem. Counting His arrival in Bethlehem, this means Jesus appears three times. Hebrews 9:28 states that Christ will appear **“a second time,”** but there’s no mention of a “third” time.

In addition, there’s nothing in Scripture to support the idea of a “secret” rapture of believers. Believers **will** be raptured, or taken up, to join Jesus in the air, but not the way the dispensational premillennialists believe.

Preterists believe that all the Scriptures about Jesus’ second coming are referring to 70 A.D. when judgment was brought upon the Jews and Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed. They have no reason to observe the Lord’s Supper and, as the apostle Paul said, **“proclaim the lord’s death until he comes.”** If Jesus’ second coming was in 70 A.D., then there was no reason to observe the Supper after that. I cannot buy into that. It makes no sense.

“Partial” preterists believe in a future return of Jesus. I have much in common with them.

Amillennialists believe that when Jesus comes the second time, bringing those martyred for the faith with Him, **all** the dead will be resurrected, and living believers will be raptured or **“caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”** (1st Thessalonians 4:17). Then non-believers will be judged, Satan will be destroyed, along with this world, there will be new heavens and a new earth, and we’ll live with Jesus forever and ever.

REASON NUMBER FOUR: AMILLENNIALISM IS THE ONLY VIEW THAT CORRECTLY EXPLAINS WHY SATAN MUST BE BOUND IN THE FIRST PLACE.

According to Premillennialism, Christ returns before the millennium begins. Revelation 19 describes the battle in which Christ defeats and destroys **“the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies”** (v. 19). Now, why would Satan be bound and prevented from deceiving the nations *after* the millennium, when they are already defeated and destroyed? Premillennialism doesn’t answer this to my satisfaction.

Amillennialism contends that chapters 16, 19, and 20 describes parallel events. The imagery of Ezekiel 39 of Gog and Magog is the same as the imagery in Revelation 19:17-21 and 20:7-10. These passages are all describing the ultimate battle we have

come to know as Armageddon. I do not believe they are two battles separated by a thousand years.

REASON NUMBER FIVE: AMILLENNIALISM HAS A MORE SENSIBLE VIEW OF THE ONE THOUSAND YEARS.

As I have already stated, amillennialism understands the one thousand years to be an inexact number, just as it is in many other Scriptures. To Amillennialists, the one thousand years is simply “a long period of time.” To make it an exact number by taking it literally here in Revelation, when it is figurative in so many other places just doesn’t make sense to me.

That the one thousand years of Revelation 20 is the church age makes sense to those who believe the church is the **“kingdom of God”** that Jesus and the apostles talked about. It’s Christ’s kingdom, and He rules it from His heavenly throne. After a period of time determined by our Father in heaven, Christ will come and eternal life with Jesus will begin.

REASON NUMBER SIX: AMILLENNIALISM BEST EXPLAINS THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD WHEN JESUS RETURNS.

Premillennialism teaches two resurrections of the dead: one at the time of the secret rapture of the church prior to the millennium and a second at the end of the millennium for unbelievers facing judgment. The apostle Paul wrote of the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, and nowhere does he present the event the way premillennialists teach it.

Amillennialists believe in one time of resurrection, first for believers and second for non-believers, that takes place when Jesus returns in the clouds to rapture His bride, the church. 1st Corinthians 15 supports the idea of a single resurrection time for both believers and non-believers. There’s no place to read into Paul’s words 1,007 years between the resurrection and rapture of believers and the resurrection to judgment of non-believers.

However, I believe that, according to Revelation 20:5-6, the spirits of those who die standing up for Jesus reign with Him throughout the church age or millennium.

But on what the Scriptures call **“the day of the Lord”** or **“the Day”** there is resurrection for both believers and non-believers. For believers, it’s a resurrection to life eternal; for non-believers, it’s a resurrection to judgment.

REASON NUMBER SEVEN: AMILLENNIALISM ALONE ACCOUNTS FOR THE USE OF THE WORD “THRONES” IN REVELATION 20:4.

Premillennialists teach that the martyred Christians will sit on literal **“thrones”** as they rule with Jesus from Jerusalem during the millennium. I can’t see this happening as they explain it and I can’t take these **“thrones”** as literal. The word **“thrones”** in other Scripture passages, refers to *heavenly* thrones, not earthly ones. Amillennialists

see these as the **“thrones”** that martyrs sit on and rule with Jesus in the intermediate state between death and eternal life during the millennium. In other words, the spirits of those who have died standing up for Jesus are reigning on spiritual thrones with Him now. That makes much more sense to me.

REASON NUMBER EIGHT: WITHOUT REVELATION 20, THERE COULD BE NO “MILLENNIAL” VIEW.

Nowhere else in Scripture is there any mention or even a hint of a millennium – not by Jesus, not by the apostle Paul, not by Peter, not by James, not by anyone else. I’m not trying to take away from what John wrote in Revelation 20. I’m just saying that for it to be considered such a crucial bit of information, it’s a little strange that it’s not mentioned anywhere else.

The amillennial take on this is that it is simply describing a rather long period of time when Satan is restricted and yet Christians are suffering before Jesus returns to bring it all to a glorious halt. The apostle Paul wrote of such a time; so did the apostle Peter. Jesus himself spoke of such a time. I think the amillennialists have it right.

CLOSING:

So, that’s what I believe about the book of Revelation. If you believe something different, well and good. We will agree to disagree. I don’t think getting Revelation right is a prerequisite to eternal life.

In closing, I call your attention to Hebrews 10:24-25:

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”