

The Mystery of the Millennium – Revelation 20

Something that has been on my heart for some time is the millennium in Revelation 20. It is certainly a mystery. Today I am just going to introduce some ideas about the millennium. Revelation 20 is like the creation account. The term “thousand years” is mentioned in the text 6 times, just like the 6 days of creation. Six thousand years was a significant number for early Christianity in reference to the Sabbath millennium or the idea of a 6,000 year time-frame for man. It is 6,000 years followed by a 7th thousand year’s time of rest, just like the Sabbath rest of the creation week.

So, where did this idea come from? Well, it is using the idea found in 2 Peter 3:8 that a day is like a thousand years with the Lord. And it applies this idea to the creation days. Now, that does not mean that each of the creation days were exactly 1,000 years as we understand it, but that human history would be like a creation week of 6,000 years followed by a Sabbath millennium of rest. Many church fathers believed this. In the Epistle of Barnabas, which is thought to have been written between 70 and 132 A.D. , the author notes, “Observe, children, what ‘he finished in six days’ means. It means this: that in six thousand years the Lord will bring everything to an end, for with him a day signifies a thousand years. And he himself bears me witness when he says, ‘Behold, the day of the Lord will be as a thousand years.’ Therefore, children, in six days - that is, in six thousand years – everything will be brought to an end. ‘And he rested on the seventh day .’ This means: when his Son comes, he will destroy the time of the lawless one and will judge the ungodly and will change the sun and the moon and the stars, and then he will truly rest on the seventh day.” (Holmes, Lightfoot, Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers, The Epistle of Barnabas*, 15.4-15.5, 182)

Now, before I break out what this might mean, I want to look at the text of Revelation 20. And I want you to keep something in mind, often in Scripture there is a heavenly or spiritual perspective and an earthly one. In Revelation 20 we will find this duality.

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 sulfur 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. Revelation 20:1-15

So, before we start with the millennial reign of Christ, I want to remind you of something. When I started my study of Revelation, I went over the millennial views because it is so important to interpreting the book of Revelation. I am not going to do that now, you can review that study if you need a review of the millennial views. What I am going to present is somewhat different based on my own study and research, not only of this text but the Bible as a whole.

In the first 3 verses we have the binding of Satan for a thousand years. Now, the angel is probably Christ himself who binds Satan. In Revelation 1:18 Jesus tells us he has the keys to death and Hades. In Mark 3:27 it states, “But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.” The Greek word for “bind” is *deo*. The same exact word is used in Revelation 20:2.

Now, I want to be clear, the binding of Satan began at Christ's first coming. This is evident in all the miracles Jesus performed, the casting out of demons and as Luke 10 puts it, “The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’ And he said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’” In addition, the New Testament tells us in many places that the enemy has been disarmed and bound. Examples are found in Colossians 2:15, 2 Peter 2:4, and Jude 6. Jude says, “And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day”. So Jesus binds Satan at his first coming, the inauguration of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. But we notice the text of Revelation says, that Satan will be released at the end of the thousand years. Now, we are going to come back to that, just keep that in mind for now.

Another dimension of the text is the duality of the heavenly and earthly perspectives as I already mentioned. The binding of Satan with a chain is a spiritual or heavenly act. Obviously the chain is not literal, but represents the defeat of Satan by the coming of Jesus. But there is also an earthly perspective because the text tells us that Satan will not deceive the nations any longer. And when we come to verse 7, it mentions the battle of Gog and Magog, and the four corners of the earth. This is a real battle on the earth. So, again there is an earthly and heavenly perspective.

Now, when we come to verses 4-6 it appears to be a heavenly scene. We have thrones and souls that have been martyred for Jesus. The text also says the saints come to life and reign with Christ. Now, some people believe this is a literal reign of Christ on earth, yet the verses seem to give a heavenly perspective. Ephesians 2:4-6 tell us, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”.

The text of Revelation mentions the first resurrection. Clearly there is more than one, either way, this is talking about the resurrection of Jesus and we through him

are raised to life with him. Numbers 19:11-12 states: “Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days. He shall cleanse himself with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean. But if he does not cleanse himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not become clean.” Christ’s resurrection is the first resurrection, on the 3rd day, in the middle of history. But there will be another resurrection on the 7th day at the end of history. So, Jesus Christ is reigning now, and if we know him, we also have been resurrected and reign with him now.

So, the question becomes, is the millennial reign, the thousand years, a literal reign on earth or is it in heaven? Is the 1,000 years symbolic of a long period of time or a literal 1,000 years? My answer is Yes! Let me explain, the number 1,000 certainly can represent a large number or manyness, like cattle on a thousand hills. This is using metaphor and not literal, right. And I absolutely believe the millennial reign of Christ started at the first coming of Jesus and continues, which would be about 2,000 years. God’s kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. However, there is also an earthly or literal fulfillment as well. Consider this, the term “thousand years” is used six times in Revelation 20. And we have already said some early church fathers believed man’s time on earth was numbered at 6,000 years. The question is, is there any evidence of this?

Tim Warner wrote a book titled, *The Time of the End*. And in this book Warner actually describes the millennial week I mentioned earlier. He quotes several early church fathers who believed in a six millennia for man followed by a Sabbath rest millennium. He quotes Clement of Rome, Justin the Martyr, Papias, Barnabas Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Commodianus, Cyprian, Methodius, Lactantius, and Victorinus (Warner, 64-71).

Now, there are many examples from Scripture using this principle, such as the creation week, also Exodus 24:15-18 which states, “Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.” Also, the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17 occurred on the 7th day or Sabbath. The text states, “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,

and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.” And certainly there are many other examples of this idea of 6 days plus a 7th principle.

Now, to adequately explain the 6,000 years idea, we need to understand God’s calendar. In Genesis 6:3 the text says, “Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” Most of us have been taught that this means that God will limit the lifespan of humans to 120 years. And this is certainly a possibility. However, another interpretation is possible. In Leviticus 25 the text discusses the Jubilee Calendar of 50-year cycles. Again, here we find the six year and 7th year cycles. God’s people would sow their land for 6 years. But in the 7th year the land was given a Sabbath rest. This timeframe presented a week of years. And 7 weeks of years was 49 years. The 50th year was a Jubilee year or the year of liberty. In this 50th year all the land returned to its original owner, all debt was cancelled, and all slaves were set free. This was a way that God would balance life and set those in bondage free. If as Tim Warner suggests, God’s Calendar is 120 Jubilee years, then this means God has limited man’s days to 6,000 years (120 X 50 = 6000). Now, I promise I am going to try and make this simple, but I first want to explain where the ideas are coming from. The years start with Adam and Warner uses the Jewish lunar calendar to count the years. He and others use AM, which stands for “Anno Mundi”, which is Latin, meaning, “the year of the world”. What is unique about this calendar is how it fits perfectly with specific events in the Bible. For example, Abram was born in 2,000 AM, which is the 40th Jubilee. The Exodus, which is one of the greatest years of liberty, occurs in 2500 AM, which is the 50th Jubilee. So, the Exodus was a Jubilee of Jubilees (50 X 50). The decree of Cyrus, which set the Jews free is on the 70th Jubilee. In 3,000 AM, which is the 60th Jubilee year, God appeared to Solomon. And according to this Jubilee calendar, Jesus is crucified between the 79th and 80th Jubilee in 3993 AM. So, this basically gets us to 4000 AM, the 80th Jubilee. So, the tricky part is when you look at the final 2,000 years.

“Come, let us return to the LORD;
for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

² After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.

³ Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;
his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth.” Hosea 6:1-3

It is recognized by many scholars that the two days in the text refers to the millennium or 2 millennial days. The third day speaks of resurrection. So, the question becomes does this refer to Christ's resurrection around 30 A.D. or is it talking about the second coming. Yes! Duane Garrett in his commentary on Hosea and Joel (The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture), notes, "The 'two days' are for Israel metaphorical for a relatively short captivity but have a literal fulfillment in the resurrection of Christ. Similarly, the raising to life is literal in the case of Christ, but in the case of Israel it is a metaphor for restoration. On the other hand, there is also a literal fulfillment for the Israel of God, when all who are Christ's shall be raised at his coming." (Garrett, 182) To simplify, the third day does represent the resurrection of Christ, but it also represents his second coming. The two days appear to be two millennial days of 1,000 years each. Okay, I am about to really simplify everything we have been talking about. We have been discussing the 6,000 years of man followed by a Sabbath rest or 7th day. How does the two millennial days fit into this? When you think of God's original covenant with his people, who do you think of – Abraham in Genesis 15. When did Abraham live – around 2000 B.C. What happened 1,000 years later? Well, around 1,000 B.C. King David, who birthed the literal kingdom of God, ruled Israel. And who comes 1,000 years later – Jesus Christ. So, from Abraham, you have two millennial days until Christ. But there is a dual fulfillment. Then, there are two more millennial days before Christ comes again. Let me also explain it this way. Remember I said there is a literal and spiritual fulfillment, there is a duality. King David ushered in the literal fulfillment of the kingdom. But there would be another day before the real spiritual fulfillment of the kingdom of God with Christ. By the same token there will be two more millennial days, and a literal and spiritual fulfillment of the kingdom. Forty years after Jesus was resurrected, just as he predicted, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans and scattered the Jewish people all over the world. Exactly 1,000 years after this something very significant happens. Remember what the text of Revelation says, that Satan will be released at the end of the 1,000 years. Well, in 1071 at the Battle of Manzikert, the Seljuk Turks defeated the Byzantine Empire. This included the Turks taking over the Holy Land. And this expansion caused anger with the Christians and led to the Crusades starting in 1095. Now, the first Crusade could certainly be seen as a fulfillment of some of what we find in Revelation. It is possible that Gog and Magog are referring to the Crusades in Revelation 20 or at least is one fulfillment of the text. Is it hard to know that for sure, but it is possible. But of course it is not the final fulfillment, it would likely be another millennial day before the final fulfillment comes.

Now, let me give you an overall picture of what I am saying. If you have ever studied statistics you would be familiar with the normal distribution bell curve. If you haven't it is a graph shaped like a bell with a mean(average) in the middle and it has standard deviations going in the positive and negative direction. There is a mean and a 1, 2, 3 is the positive direction and on the other side there is a negative standard deviation of 1, 2, 3. So picture that in your mind. There is a point in the middle and three points to the right and three points to the left. Now, a while back I did a study on the Tabernacle, and one of the pieces of furniture in the Tabernacle was the golden lampstand. The lampstand was a perfect picture of light in the Tabernacle. If you have never seen a picture of the lampstand, it has seven branches. There is one main shaft and three branches come out of it on each side, three on the left and three on the right. Here is what I am suggesting. History is like that bell curve and the golden lampstand. The center piece of history is Jesus Christ. And there are 3 branches on the left and 3 on the right. If we go back from Jesus in one thousand year increments we first come to King David, then another 1,000 years and we come to Abraham. But what if we go back one more branch or 1,000 years. Now, we know going back before Abram with exact years is very difficult, but looking at Biblical chronology there was a covenant before Abraham and that was with Noah. About 1,000 before Abraham you come to the time of Enoch, Methusaleh, and Noah. Now, to be clear these dates are approximate. The Flood of course was not 1,000 years before Abraham, but Noah was born close to 3,000 B.C. Obviously these guys lived a long time before the flood, so we are crossing over hundreds of years. If you look at an AM chart of years, Noah's birth is around 1051 AM and Abram in 2000 AM. That is approximately 1,000 years.

So, if we swing to the other side of the history, we have already noted, 1,000 years after the 70 A.D. we have the beginning of the Crusades. And if we move 1,000 years from that time, we of course come close to our time. The question remains, if Jesus is the center of history, do we have 3,000 years on each side of him. Or is it 2 millennial days, starting with Abraham.

If we were to chart this out thinking of a seven day week - it might look like this: Day 1, Adam to Noah, Day 2, Noah to Abraham, Day 3 Abraham to David, Day 4, David to Jesus, Day 5, Jesus to 1071 or the Crusades, Day 6, from the Crusades to Now. And the final question is when does the 7th Day start? Will it be another 1,000 years or within our lifetimes? Only God knows the time.

When we look at the creation days, the 7th day does not actually end. By the same token, the final reign of Jesus Christ does not end. Also, in Revelation after the last thousand years is mentioned in verse 7, you have the battle of Gog and Magog,

where Satan is finally defeated and thrown into the lake of fire. Then the final verses of the chapter starting in verse 11 speak of the Great White Throne Judgment. What I am saying is that when the years end for man, after 6,000 years, then there is a final battle where Satan is defeated. This ushers in the final Sabbath, the 7th day, which does not end. This is what the framework I have given you reveals. We could be very close to the end of man's days. Jesus is coming back! Will you be ready?

Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”