

Does the Bible teach that there will be a future 1000 year millennial kingdom on earth? Will there be different times the resurrection/rapture will occur for believers and unbelievers separated by a thousand years? What will happen when Christ returns? And what will usher the end of the age? These are key questions when discussing the different millennial views. The position I will take and build a case for is amillennialism, which means no millennial. I have been persuaded toward the amillennial position as I study the scriptures as a whole. From my studies of the scriptures on this issue I have concluded that Revelation 20, along with other passages from Revelation, is very symbolic of what has already happened in Christ from His work on the cross and resurrection. Historically many Christians have held the amillennial view for very long time; "As Louis Berkhof has noted, while 'the name is new indeed...the view to which it is applied is as old as Christianity'" (Strimple, p. 83).

The amillennial position believes that there is no future millennium yet to come. The "millennium" described in Revelation 20 is currently being fulfilled in the church age today. The amillennialist would exclaim that we are living in the last days and the events that have occurred in the past, present and in the future will be fulfilling the accounts written by John in Revelation 20. "The exact duration of the church age cannot be known, and the expression "thousand years" is simply a figure of speech for a long period of time in which God's perfect purposes will be accomplished. From an amillennial viewpoint, the present church age will continue until the time of Christ's return" (Grudem, p.439). Also, the amillennialist believes that the resurrection of believers and unbelievers, the final judgment of Christ, and the establishment of the new heavens and new earth will happen at "one event" and not in separate secessions or after a "thousand years." This "one event" will be the ultimate climax of all creation being restored, judgment of all and God establishing His eternal Kingdom when Christ returns. Matthew 25:31-41 describes Christ's second coming, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your

inheritance'...Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" This occurrence is one event, both believers and unbelievers are judged and presented before the King of Kings, Jesus Christ when He returns. The premillennialist will divide this "one event" into Christ's return, the resurrection of believers, a millennium reign of Christ with the saints and some coming to Christ during this reign, after the millennium the resurrection of unbelievers, judgment of Christ and finally the renewed heaven and earth. The amillennium "...position does not argue against a millennium but that there is to be expected no future literal, earthly-historical millennium that is not already present in some form. Both pre- and postmillennial positions reject realized millennialism [amillennialism] for failing to view the millennium sufficiently seriously as a biblical promise to be literally fulfilled in history" (Oden, p. 423). The amillennialist views the millennium mentioned in Revelation 20 as a symbolic period of the church age.

Rather than focus on Revelation 20 to explain this millennial issue, as most premillennialist do, I would like to review important scriptures to explain further why the amillennialist view seems to prevail when scripture is viewed as a whole. "When we look through the whole of the Bible, only one passage (Rev. 20:1-6) appears to teach a future earthly millennial rule of Christ, and that passage is itself obscure. It is unwise to base such a major doctrine on one passage of uncertain and widely disputed interpretation" (Grudem, p. 439). When exploring any issue that is presented in the scriptures it is important to study the scriptures wholly and not focus on one passage alone. "Ladd [a premillennialist] concludes his book with this statement: 'the basic question remains: What does the exegesis of Revelation 20 require? All other considerations must be subservient to the exegesis of this passage.' Surely that is an astonishing statement! Are we to bring all the rest of the Bible to Revelation 20 and push it, squeeze it, and make it fit in? I suggest that is a false approach to the interpretation of the biblical prophecy" (Strimple, p. 120). I agree with Strimple in understanding how to study the Bible. Let all the scriptures bring revelation and understanding to different doctrines and issues. If Revelation 20 were the only passage presented in trying to understand what will happen at the end then I would be a premillennialist.

However, we do not just have Revelation 20 in trying to understand this millennium issue. There is more evidence in the New Testament for an “one event” that will occur at the “last day” as Jesus stated four times in John 6 (John 6:39, 40, 44, 54) rather than an interim thousand year period between Christ returns and the final judgment and the new heavens and earth established.

Jesus warned those who were looking for a future kingdom on earth, "...The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:20-21). This is not to say that there can be no future kingdom manifestation, but it does say that the Kingdom has a present reality.

Jesus describes the end of the age in Matthew 13:40-43 as being one event when He returns to judge the unbelievers and places the saints to reign with Him in the eternal Kingdom. Jesus tells of the Son of man sending forth His angels and gathering all of the unrighteous so that He may judge and cast "them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42). He goes on to say, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43). There is no mention of a future 1000 year kingdom before the judgment of the unbelievers.

In John 6:39-54 Jesus mentions that all believers will be raised up at the same time on “the last day.” Jesus makes no reference of an interim time (1000 year millennium) after raising some of those who believed in Christ, and then a second raising of those that come to faith in Christ during that interim or millennium period, as the premillennialist believes will happen. Jesus said, “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day...No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day... Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:39-54). Jesus did not say he would raise some at one time and others at another time. Jesus emphasized that the raising of believers will occur only once, on “the last day” as one

event. If all believers are to be raised up on the last day, as Jesus stated, then it stands to reason that there will not be several different resurrections of believers separated by a thousand years. Indeed, if the last day is really the last day, then we cannot postulate a few more days to follow, let alone a thousand years. The last day is the last day, the end.

“The New Testament makes frequent reference to the resurrection of [all] *the dead*” (Matt. 22:31; Luke 20:35; Acts 4:2, italics added), so as to underscore the expected event as corporate experience as well as corporeal” (Oden, p. 397). John 5:28-29 mentions this raising of both believers and unbelievers at one time. “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice, and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28-29). The resurrection of believers and unbelievers is not separated by a millennium. Jesus proclaimed this occurrence would happen at once. This “argument often proposed in favor of amillennialism is the fact that Scripture teaches only one resurrection, when both believers and unbelievers will be raised, not two resurrections (a resurrection of believers before the millennium begins, and a resurrection of unbelievers to judgment after the end of the millennium). This is an important argument, because the premillennial view requires two separate resurrections separated by a thousand years” (Grudem, p. 440).

The Apostle Paul does not teach of a future millennium. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 Paul exclaims that when Christ returns the resurrection occurs and death is defeated at once. “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:51-54). If after Christ second coming there is a millennial period, as premillennialist believe, then sin and death still have reign because there are still those who do

not believe and will ultimately be cast into eternal death at the final Judgment. The amillennialist believes "...the return of Christ, the resurrection of believers, the Final Judgment, the cosmic renewal, and the eternal state are all concurrent. When this biblical convergence is torn apart and a millennial kingdom on this earth inserted, we are faced with a situation in which believers will be resurrected to live in glorified bodies on this sin-ravaged earth alongside the unbelieving and unresurrected" (Strimple, p. 270). This goes is in exact opposition to Apostle Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 15. If Paul is saying that death will be defeated at Christ's return, then we can understand that Christ is reigning now and will continue to reign until death has been defeated. "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). If death is defeated at the rapture/second coming and if this is the last enemy to be defeated, then Paul's theology does not allow room for any further enemies to arise a thousand years later.

Further evidence of Paul's view of eschatology is seen in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10. "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you." Notice the "you" in verse 6 Paul is speaking to the 1st century church in Thessalonica. It is evident from this that he is not speaking to some future group of "great tribulation" saints after the church had been taken away and neither is he speaking of a relief that shall be given after a thousand years. He is speaking of Christ's second coming. This passage promises that the present difficulties of Christians shall be relieved when the Lord is revealed from heaven with His angels, to take vengeance on the ungodly with everlasting destruction, and be glorified in the saints. Premillennialism teaches that judgment takes place only at the end of an earthly millennium and final judgment leading to the unbelievers being

punished with everlasting destruction. But previously mentioned verses in 2 Thessalonians state something totally different. Paul states that it is when Christ returns that the unbelieving are judged and “punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Also, the Apostle Paul stated in verse 10, all this would take place “on that day.” “In the Greek text this phrase stands alone at the end of verse 10 as a shortened reference to a special day in biblical prophecy: the Day of the Lord, the Day of Judgement” (Strimple, p. 103). It is the same as Jesus stated in John 6 where He stated that the resurrection of the believer would occur on the “last day.” It is one event taking place and not a series of events spanning across periods of time.

In 2 Peter 3:10 “the day of the Lord” and “the day of God” in 2 Peter 3:12 “refers to the second coming of Christ” (Williams, p. 120). This second coming of Christ that is mentioned in 2 Peter 3 is linked with the renewal of heavens and earth that is described in 2 Peter 3:11-13, “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 of its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” “Notice that Peter here gives believers the same exhortation to watchfulness and holiness of life in view of the coming disintegration of the present heavens and earth that is given elsewhere in the New Testament in view of the coming of Christ himself. Both Christ’s coming and the transformation of the cosmos are presented as the goal of the Christian’s watchful waiting, for both will occur together” (Strimple, p. 107). Also 2 Peter 3:7 shows a link to the “day of the Lord” to “the day of judgment and destructions of ungodly men.” There is not a thousand year period mentioned by Peter that is between the second coming of Christ, the renewal of the heavens and earth and the Day of Judgment. In 2 Peter 3 Peter links it all together as “one event” that will happen on the “Day of the Lord.” Again, this is another support to the “one event” occurrence the amillennialists hold to.

The amillennialist does not deny the words of Revelation 20, they merely see John's vision as a symbol for the present reality of this age. However, it is difficult to explain everything in Revelation 20 but as I mentioned before we must not base our millennial view on this one chapter. In Revelation 20:1-3 it states that Satan is bound and then cast into an Abyss for a thousand years. For the amillennialist this binding of Satan has occurred with Christ's work on the cross. In Colossians 2:15 says, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the cross." And in Hebrews 2:14-15, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Revelation 20:1-3 is a symbol of what has already occurred in Christ. Prior to Christ, the nations were completely deceived by Satan to the point that very few outside of the confines of the nation of Israel ever heard the truth of about God. But with the coming of Christ and the age of the church, the gospel exploded throughout the world. The very fact that the gospel has gone to the nations and has been received by people in those nations is a sign of Satan having been bound. In Revelation 20:4 John states he saw thrones and souls which seems to be a reference to heaven and not a future millennial earthly kingdom reign being described. The amillennialist view of the thousand year reign stated in Revelation 20:4 is symbolic of a long, undesignated period of time as even some post- and premillennialist would agree to as well. However, I feel this is another reiteration of how the book of Revelation contains many symbolic messages and cannot be described from a literal point of view only. The amillennialist views the phrase "come to life" mentioned in Revelation 20:4,5 as a phrase used to describe what happens to a person spiritually when they come into the presence of God. In regards to Revelation 20:4 "amillennial interpreters will take the verb *ezesan* to mean 'they came to life' in the sense of coming into heavenly existence in the presence of Christ and beginning to reign with him from heaven... In a similar way, when verse 5 says, 'The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended,' this is understood to mean they did not come into God's presence for judgment until the end of the thousand years" (Grudem, p. 440). In Revelation 20:4-6 there are several references to a first resurrection. What is the nature of this

first resurrection? Remember that the author of this book is the Apostle John. He has already set forth the mention of a first resurrection in his Gospel Account. “I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). Jesus was not denying the reality of a future physical resurrection. He would mention that in verses 28-29 of John 5. In the same way, Paul speaks of how there was a time when we were dead in trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1), but God made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with Him, both positional and spiritually (Ephesians 2:5-6). This is the hope of the believer’s soul to be united with their creator at death. “The reference to the first resurrection implies a second, true—a second resurrection for the same people! Similarly, ‘the second death’ (Rev. 20:6) implies a first death—but also for the same people, the unbelievers. We might say that the believer in Christ will experience one death and two resurrections. The first resurrection occurs when he or she departs this life and is immediately ushered into the presence of Christ to reign with Him. The second resurrection will be bodily at Christ’s second coming, when believers are made ready for eternal state (I Cor. 15:50). Unbelievers, by contrast, will experience just one resurrection—and that a resurrection unto condemnation—but they will know two deaths. The first death is psycho-physical on this earth. The second death will be eternal, following the judgment” (Strimple, p. 127).

The amillennial view is criticized by this understanding of two resurrections, spiritual and physical. However, I feel this just makes sense. Each person is made up, as I Thessalonians 5:23 states, of spirit, soul and body. Also, in John 3:5-6, along with other passages in scripture, it states how the spirit of a person is changed for those who are born again in Christ. The spirit of a person is important to God and is made alive when belief in Christ occurs. 1 Peter 1:3 states, “Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” This new birth is not a physical birth but renewal of a person spirit becoming alive in Christ. So when believer dies that person’s spirit is united with God in Glory. The renewed spirit does not stay in a person’s dead body but is resurrected. This is a spiritual resurrection of a person’s spirit being united with God

in heaven. However, God is not just concerned about our spirits being renewed and made alive in Him but also God is concerned about our bodies being restored and renewed as well. The physical resurrection of the body is a reality and because God wants to restore us completely. "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (I Corinthians 15:12-17). Both resurrections, spiritually and physically, of the Christian will occur and this helps explain what is stated in Revelation 20:4-6.

Those who believe in a millennial also believe that the nation of Israel will be restored. There are references in the Old Testament that there will be a rising of a kingdom and a temple of God that will reign over every kingdom and endure forever (Isaiah 2:2-4, Micah 4:1-8, Daniel 2:34-35,44). As the amillennialists believe, I agree that Israel will be restored but the true Israel is those who are in Christ as the Apostle Paul proclaimed in Romans 9, "In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring...It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy...even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: 'I will call them my people who are not my people; and I will call her my loved one who is not my loved one'" (Romans 9:8,16,24-25). The work of Christ on the cross ushers in the restoration of Israel; a spiritual Israel. "Since Christ is the true Israel, the true seed of Abraham, we who are in Christ by faith and the working of His Spirit are the true Israel of faith, not of mere natural descent" (Strimple, p. 88-89). Paul reiterates this in Galatians 3:26-29, "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you

are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Also, in Christ the true temple of God has been established. John, in Revelation 21, states what he saw as the "Holy City, the new Jerusalem" (Rev. 21:2) being established. But this again is a reference to a symbolic message of what we have in Christ. Furthermore, John states in Revelation 21:22, "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." "If Jews should succeed some day in building a new temple on the rock in Jerusalem, that would not be in fulfillment of God's Word, but in denial of it and His work, a denial of the Lord's Christ-as John would call it, a synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9, 3:9). No other foundation can anyone lay than the one already laid (I Cor 3:11)" (Strimple, p. 99). Jesus Christ rules and reigns now as the King of kings as Paul proclaimed to Timothy in I Timothy 6:15-16. "God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen."

In trying to grasp the millennium or amillennium issue presented in the scriptures we need to always keep in mind that our ultimate hope does not lie in the millennium but in Christ alone. Titus 2:13-14 says it well, "We wait for the blessed hope---the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." The Christian life should be lived as if Christ is coming back tomorrow. Our focus should not be whether there will be a millennium or not. We simply do not know when Christ will return for Jesus said himself he will come back like a thief in the night (Matthew 24:42-44). I agree with the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the church in Thessalonica saying, "Now brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (I Thessalonians 5:1-2). Our hope is not about knowing if there will be a millennium or not. Our hope is about waiting in expectation for Christ to return and being confident of living in His presence for forever.

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