

## September Questions and Answers: The 1000 Years of Revelation 20

Franklin Church of Christ  
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PM Worship

### Introduction:

Tonight's question is essentially: "Please, explain the 1000 years of Revelation 20."

I am answering this not because I believe I have all the answers on **Revelation**, but because I have a different perspective on it than most. I want to share this perspective to help your study. When we are done, I am more than willing to hear your perspective. If there is something I have missed, then we can help one another. My hope with tonight's lesson is not to provide a definitive explanation of **Revelation 20**. Rather, it is just to help promote study of this awesome book.

### Discussion:

- I. What **Revelation 20** cannot mean.
  - A. **Revelation 20** is used as the number one proof text to claim that at some point in our future, Jesus will return to the earth to establish an earthly kingdom, over which He will reign from David's throne in Jerusalem for 1000 years. While I am certain I do not fully understand **Revelation 20**, I am certain it does not teach this.
  - B. Note what Jesus taught about the kingdom He planned to establish.
    1. **Matthew 16:28; Mark 9:1** and **Luke 9:27** show Jesus planned to establish His kingdom within the lifetimes of His audience. Since everyone in His audience is now dead, His kingdom must already be established. We are not awaiting it—we need to be in it right now.
    2. Jesus explained the nature of His kingdom in **John 18:36** saying, "My kingdom is not of this world." The Jews of Jesus' day wanted an earthly kingdom and the Premillennialists of our day want one as well, but Jesus said His kingdom is not earthly. His kingdom is not about earthly cities, lands, armies and battles. It is a spiritual kingdom. Therefore, we do not look for a physical fulfillment of the kingdom promises but spiritual.
  - C. Note some other passages about the kingdom found in the New Testament.
    1. **Colossians 1:13** claims Christians are already transferred into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. We are not awaiting some future kingdom but are already in it.
    2. When Peter preached in **Acts 2:25-36**, he explained that Jesus, the descendent of David, had been promised by the Spirit to sit on David's throne at the right hand of God. Peter makes it abundantly clear that Jesus has already been exalted to the Father's right hand and is already reigning on David's throne from heaven. [Additional information: the New Testament claims Jesus is already at the right hand of God fourteen times—**Acts 2:25, 33; 5:31; 7:55, 56; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; I Peter 3:22**]
  - D. Note passages in **Revelation** that teach about Jesus' kingdom.
    1. **Revelation 1:5** said Jesus was already the ruler of the kings of the earth. John was not prophesying Jesus' future rule but describing His already established rule.
    2. **Revelation 1:6** said Jesus had already made His people a kingdom and priests. John was not prophesying a future kingdom but describing an already established one.
    3. **Revelation 1:9** demonstrated neither John nor his audience were expecting some future great tribulation or kingdom, but were already participating together in both.
    4. Finally, **Revelation 5:9-10** repeated that when Jesus purchased men from every tribe, tongue, people and nation with His blood, He made them a kingdom and priests. Again, John was not prophesying a future kingdom and priesthood but an already established one.
  - E. Therefore, though I still have many questions about **Revelation 20**, I have one question answered. **Revelation 20** does not prophecy a future earthly kingdom that will last in real time for 1000 years with Jesus reigning in physical Jerusalem on David's throne. If it did, that would contradict the often repeated and established New Testament theme that Jesus is already reigning in the heavenly Jerusalem, at the right hand of God; over His kingdom, the people He purchased with His blood. I hope I have demonstrated that truth to you clearly. Now, I do not just want to tell you what **Revelation 20** certainly does not mean. I want to present to you what I believe it does mean. To do that, we must first understand the apocalyptic nature of **Revelation**.

## II. The nature of Apocalyptic Literature.

- A. **Revelation** is written in a very specific literary style. One of the biggest mistakes made in studying this book is to misunderstand this genre. If I were to ask you in what genre **Revelation** was written, what would you say? Most of us would say, "Prophecy." But that is not entirely accurate. **Revelation** is not a prophetic book, it is an apocalyptic book. Certainly there are prophetic elements in it. But **Revelation** is an apocalyptic book with prophetic elements, not a prophetic book with apocalyptic elements. We are not familiar with apocalyptic literature. However, our first century counterparts were. God did not make up this genre with the **Revelation**. People in that time were very familiar with the already established rules and norms of this kind of literature.
- B. Allow me then to present to you some of the norms of apocalyptic literature.
1. *Apocalypse is born out of faith in crisis.* The big question of apocalypse is, "If God is so good and powerful, why are such bad things happening to us, His children?" That is **Revelation's** question. In **1:9**, John explains that he was a partaker in tribulation. In the introductory letters, he spoke of Ephesus' toil and perseverance (**2:2-3**), Smyrna's tribulation and poverty (**2:9**) and Pergamum's martyr, Antipas (**2:13**). These Christians were going through a crisis of faith. They needed immediate help, not a promise of good things millennia down the road. Thus, John repeatedly assured his readers that his message was immediate. **1:1**—"things which must soon take place." **1:3**—"the time is near." **3:11**—"I am coming quickly." **22:6**—"things which must soon take place." **22:7**—"I am coming quickly." **22:10**—"the time is near." **22:20**—"I am coming quickly."
  2. *Apocalypse is dualistic.* To answer the big question, apocalypse speaks not only of what we can see in the world, but draws back the curtain to reveal what God is doing behind the scenes. This assures the audience that God has not lost, but is working and will win in His time. Thus, John is invited into heaven to see what is going on there (**4:1**). There are bigger forces at work than what we see (**Ephesians 6:12**). We are just a small part of a big picture. We increase our faith by opening our hearts to what God is really doing in heaven.
  3. *Apocalypse is symbolic.* **Revelation 1:1** says that this revelation was "communicated" (NASB) or "signified" (KJV, NKJV) to Jesus' servant John. The term translated here (*semaino*—Strong's #4591) means to indicate with signs or to "sign-ify." Therefore, we are not surprised to see symbolic language. Regrettably, the Premillennial camp has made such a big deal of taking the Bible literally (which they do not) that we too often believe we are lessening the meaning of scripture if we say it is symbolic. We are not weakening scripture; we are reading it the way God said we should, as signs and symbols.
  4. *Apocalypse is grand, visual, vivid and extravagant.* In the genre of parables, we see detailed symbols where one thing represents another. In the Parable of the Sower (**Matthew 13**), seed is symbolic of the word and soil is symbolic of the listener's heart. Apocalyptic literature does not work the same way. Certainly, apocalyptic literature employs this kind of representative symbolism at times. However, we must not force that kind of symbolism unilaterally through **Revelation**. You have heard someone say, "Do not miss the forest for the trees." Apocalyptic literature is about the forest, not the trees. The trees are not there for us to try to examine each one. They are there because forests have trees. We do not have to ask what every part of the vision represents; rather we ask what the vision as a whole represents. We do not have to ask what the four living creatures represent, or the 24 elders, or the two witnesses, the stones of the gates of the city, etc. We need to ask, "What is the overriding message of the vision presented?" Further, these visions are presented in a very visual and extravagant way. Not because each vivid detail in the picture represents something, but because they drive the big picture message deeper into the reader's heart by providing a more exciting learning experience. It is like watching a movie. We know the good guys wear white hats and the bad guys wear black hats, but we do not ask why there is a saloon, a jail and tumbleweeds in the movie—it is a western. Those details just fill the picture. It would be a very boring movie if these details were not in the picture. But we do not get bogged down with their meaning. Which would you remember more—a doctrinal treatise on the victory of God over Satan or a visual picture of God's army overcoming the enemy's army with fire flaming from heaven to consume the enemy and then birds eating the

enemy's dead flesh? Which would you remember more—a prosaic discussion of how government and false religion can oppose true Christianity or a picture of giant beasts that wage war on God's people, expect everyone to worship them and brand their own people with a mark on the forehead? The modern fascination with **Revelation** testifies to the effectiveness of this kind of literature.

5. *Apocalypse instills complete confidence in God's triumph.* Apocalypse is written because God's people are enduring a crisis of faith. They need confidence. Therefore, it explains that things are going on behind the scenes that we do not know about. God is working in ways we cannot fathom and for reasons we cannot know. In His time, He will secure His victory, judge His enemies, vindicate His people and reward His faithful. Apocalyptic literature, therefore, paints the present picture as vividly terrible with pictures of famine, pestilence, death, the slaying of powerful people on God's side and the attack of beasts. But then it presents God's judgment and victory in equally powerful and certain terms, stars being blotted from the sky, the moon turning to blood, plagues of horselike scorpions, 100 pound hailstones, fire consuming the enemies and the birds eating their flesh. This is why the book starts with seven letters to churches in Asia repeating seven times what is promised "to him who overcomes" (**2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21**).
- C. Within this framework, as we come to **Revelation 20**, we are not expecting to find some detailed prophetic timeline of future events. Instead, we expect to see a very grand, very vivid, very symbolic, very extravagant big picture of God's victory over His people's enemies.

### III. Getting to **Revelation 20**?

- A. In the letters to the seven churches (**Revelation 2-3**), Jesus demonstrated His knowledge of the hearts and actions of men. He acknowledged the tribulation His people were enduring. Further, He encouraged His people to persevere, promising them reward if they overcame and endured.
- B. In **Revelation 4-5**, He gave a behind the scenes vision of God's glory and heaven's confidence. He encouraged His church to overcome and reminded them that He had already overcome for them (**5:5**) and they just needed to stay on His side.
- C. Throughout the rest of the book, Jesus provided John with a series of interlocking visions, portraying the same big picture. There were two sides in both the spiritual realm and the earthly. On the side of good and right, we find the Father, the Sacrificed Savior and the Holy Spirit, with their angelic hosts and armies and their multitude of followers on the earth (**1:4-5; 5:11; 7:9; 19:11-18**). On the side of evil is Satan with his angelic hosts, plus his myriads of followers, and his two great beasts—government and false religion (**12:7-9; 11:9-10; 19:19; 13:1-18**). Throughout these visions we see the same theme. Despite the power of God and His people, at times things look very bad. So bad, that those who have died will wonder how long God will let this go on (**6:10**). Yet repeatedly, God's judgment and victory come in to vindicate His people and judge His enemies (**6:12-17; 7:9-17; 9:3-6; 11:11-14; etc.**).
- D. One thing we must note within this book is the constant contrast between those who are marked by Satan and the beast in **13:16-18** and those who are marked with the name of God who refuse to be marked by the beast in **7:2-9** and **14:1**.
- E. In **Revelation 19**, we are presented with another picture of great victory for God's people. Jesus, the word of God, goes out with His army to wage war against the beast, the false prophet and those who received the beast's mark. In **19:20-21**, the beast and the false prophet were cast into the lake of fire and their host was killed with the sword and eaten by the birds. Jesus won. That brings us into **Revelation 20**.

### IV. What do we see in **Revelation 20**?

- A. *What do we see regarding our ultimate enemy, Satan?*
  1. Interestingly, he is not immediately cast into the lake of fire like the beast and the false prophet. Instead, he is only bound for 1000 years in the abyss (**20:3**).
  2. After the 1000 years, he was released for a short time (**20:3**). When he was released he went back to his old tricks of deceiving the nations (**20:7-8**).

3. Satan used his deceptions to get his followers to attack God. Even though His army was like the sands of the seashore, he was again defeated. Ultimately, he was not tucked away in a prison but cast into the lake of fire, tormented day and night forever (**20:9-10**).
  4. The “released for a short time” business causes trouble for many. Remember, we are not looking for some detailed prophetic timeline. We are looking for the big picture message. What is that message? I think there are two keys to help us understand this.
    - a. First, notice **vs. 8**. What will Satan do when he is released? He will deceive the nations. That is what Satan was doing all throughout this book. See specifically **12:9**. He will just be doing the same thing over again, deceiving the nations, probably using government, false religion and worldly society to promote an attack against God and His people.
    - b. Second, do not overlook the end of **vs. 3**. How long will Satan be given freedom? Only a short time. But look back to **12:12**. Satan was only allowed to deceive the nations, using the beast and the false prophet for a short time. This is nothing new. Again, all we see is that Satan gets another shot at trying to win. He will deceive many and they will attack God’s people, but he will lose.
  5. Keeping this in mind, what do we learn?
    - a. First, while the earthly forces that Satan used throughout the majority of **Revelation** are utterly destroyed and cast in to the lake of fire, Satan was not. When the battle the Christians were fighting when **Revelation** was written was over, they would win the victory and Satan would lose. But Satan would be back and he would try again. In reality, what we find is an apocalyptic version of **Luke 4:13**. Satan is defeated and flees, but looks for another opportune time. However, God’s people who resist will be victorious. This point, by the way, is why **Revelation** is a message for our times as well as the initial readers. While they heard about victory over the particular tribulation through which they were going, we learn that all of Satan’s attacks on God’s people will go the same way. When we face the same situation they faced, Satan will lose.
    - b. Second, within this chapter note the time contrast. Satan’s deceptions and attacks are actually for a short time. But the victory and the peace that comes from resisting and overcoming lasts for a long time, 1000 years. That is not some detailed prophetic timeline drawn to scale. It is just a contrast to remind us that our suffering will pass and victory in Jesus will be worth it.
    - c. Third, while Satan will still get to attack God’s people, in the end he, too, will be ultimately defeated and cast into the lake of fire and will be tormented day and night forever and ever (**Revelation 20:10**).
- B. *What do we see regarding the saints?*
1. **Revelation 20:4-6** is actually a very amazing passage, pulling together many threads from the entire book of **Revelation** into just three verses.
  2. First, we see a fulfillment of the promises made in the introductory letters to the seven churches of Asia. Specifically **2:10-11**, **26-27**; **3:21-23** are seen as fulfilled. Those who overcome reign with Christ, receiving thrones and implicitly crowns.
  3. Not only are they kings, but they are also priests, ministering to Christ as His servants as well as reigning with Him at the same time. This brings back the picture of **7:14-17**. Those who come through the tribulation of Satan’s attack will still serve God.
  4. Interestingly, the above two issues are not necessarily just about overcoming. Remember **1:6** and **5:10**. Every Christian is a king and priest with Christ (**cf. I Peter 2:9**). What does that mean? Jesus is not promising that some new thing will happen down the road if we hang on. Rather, He is assuring us that nothing changes throughout tribulation. Keep in mind the purpose of this book. **Revelation** is assuring its audience that no matter how bad things get, God knows those who are His and will not lose them through some kind of heavenly oversight. This is an apocalyptic version of **Romans 8:31-39**. Nothing separates us from God as long as we love Him and do not turn to follow the beast.
  5. Further, this passage calls to mind two distinct groups of people. It calls to mind the martyrs under the altar of **6:9-11**, that is, those who died in the battle. It also calls to mind the people who overcame the tribulation, living through it in **7:14-15** and **15:2-4**. What does this passage tell us? If we are faithful, it does not matter if we live through tribulation or die in it,

we will still be victorious with Christ. This is an apocalyptic version of the similar message taught in **I Thessalonians 4:13-18**.

6. We must not forget that one of the major aspects of **Revelation** is a contrast between the two sides. This issue of God's people reigning for 1000 years presents a contrast to Satan's kings in **17:12**. Those who follow the beast will appear to reign. Christians may be tempted to go over to their side. However, their seeming reign will last only for an hour. The true reign of God's people will be for 1000 years. Again, this is not a detailed prophetic timeline drawn to scale. It is simply a contrast that shows which side we want to be on.
7. Finally, we must reiterate that this picture just drives home the big message of **Revelation**. God wins. His people win with Him.

### **Conclusion:**

**Revelation** begins with seven letters in which we learn not everything is going well with the brethren. The tribulation was taking its toll. Some were leaving their first love. Some were adulterating the doctrine of Christ. Some were compromising with false religion. Some were banking on their reputation but had no real life. Some had been so impacted by the world they were lukewarm. This book was written because souls were in peril. The book begins with this presentation of the dangerous position many were in. After providing the grand, vivid and extravagant pictures of Christ's victory and judgment on those who switch sides, the book ends with an invitation in **22:16-21**. Jesus is offering life giving water. We can drink from the river of life that flows from the throne of God right now. But we have to choose sides. If we do not take the warnings and promises of this book seriously, believing them and acting based on them, then we will be the ones punished by these plagues and our name will be removed from the book of life. Which side will you choose?