

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE MILLENNIUM

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The kingdom of God has multiple facets to it. One important phase of God's kingdom program is the millennium. The position argued here is that the millennial kingdom of Christ is earthly and future from our standpoint in history. The millennium is not being fulfilled today but will follow certain events such as worldwide tribulation, cosmic signs, the rescue of God's people, and judgment of the nations. This view of the millennium is found in both testaments of the Bible. The Old Testament tells of an intermediate era that is different from both our present age and the coming eternal state. The New Testament then tells us how long this intermediate period will be—one thousand years.

Introduction

Revelation 20 tells of a kingdom reign of Jesus Christ that lasts for one thousand years. Yet the nature of this kingdom and when the reign of Jesus the Messiah occurs have been major issues of debate. The purpose of this article is to address both the nature and the timing of the one thousand-year reign of Christ or what is commonly called the “millennium.” We will argue that the millennium of Revelation 20 is an earthly kingdom that is established by Jesus after His second coming to earth. Thus, the millennium is both *earthly* and *future* from our standpoint in history.¹ This millennial and messianic kingdom of Christ follows certain events—a unique period of tribulation and distress for Israel, peril for dwellers of the earth, cosmic signs, the rescue of God's people, and judgment of the nations.

This view that the return of Jesus to earth ushers in the millennial kingdom is called premillennialism. This title comes from the belief that the second coming of

¹ “Earthly” is not in contrast to spiritual. The millennium is an earthly kingdom but it also has spiritual characteristics and requirements.

Jesus is before (pre-) the millennium. Premillennialism is in contrast to amillennialism and postmillennialism which insist that the millennium is in operation now between the two comings of Jesus. For those two perspectives the millennium is *spiritual* and *now*. While respecting the historical debate between the millennial views, this writer will argue that premillennialism alone is consistent with the biblical witness while amillennialism and postmillennialism are not. Since the case for premillennialism is based on many positive evidences from Scripture, this paper will focus mostly on why the premillennial view is correct and not on why the other two views are in error.²

A Rationale for Premillennialism

Before looking at the specific biblical arguments for premillennialism, we will offer a rationale for the premillennial view. Since the Fall of man (see Genesis 3) God has enacted a plan to bring this rebel planet back into conformity with His universal kingdom in which His will is perfectly done. Part of this plan is for His Son, Jesus the Messiah, to rule the nations, including His enemies, from Jerusalem and a restored Israel. He will rule with righteousness but also with a rod of iron (see Pss 2 110; Rev 2:26–27). Jesus must rule over the planet that rejected Him. When this phase of the kingdom program is over Christ will hand the kingdom over to God the Father and the millennial kingdom will merge into the universal kingdom or what is often referred to as the eternal state (see 1 Cor 15:24–28). Thus, Scripture teaches an “intermediate kingdom” that is distinct from both this present evil age and the coming perfect eternal state. The time period for this intermediate kingdom is explicitly stated to be one thousand years in Revelation 20, but the concept of an earthly messianic kingdom is found in both the Old and New Testaments. It is not the case that Revelation 20 is the only passage that supports premillennialism. Premillennialism is rooted in the Old Testament and stated in a New Testament book (Revelation) that is explicitly prophetic in its genre and gives chronological details concerning things to come. Premillennialism is based on a consistent application of historical–grammatical hermeneutics which take into account the genre and literary structure of the books of the Bible, along with canonical

² The three millennial views in summary are: (1) Amillennialism—the “thousand year period” (or millennium) is fulfilled spiritually now between the two comings of Christ. Christ is ruling in his millennial kingdom now over His church and/or in the hearts of His people. Satan is restrained in his ability to deceive the nations but he is still active. While Christ’s kingdom is in operation this is also an evil age. The world will continue to get worse until Jesus comes again. The millennium will end with Jesus’ second coming and the Eternal State will be ushered in; (2) Postmillennialism—the millennium is fulfilled spiritually now between the two comings of Christ as Christ’s kingdom starts small and eventually permeates all areas of society, Christianizing the world. Satan is restrained in his ability to deceive the nations but he is still active. When the gospel has triumphed over all areas then Jesus will return. The world will get better and better and then Jesus comes again. Then the eternal state will be ushered in; (3) Premillennialism—the millennial kingdom is entirely future from our standpoint. This kingdom will be established immediately after Jesus physically returns to earth. Then Satan’s activities will completely cease for one thousand years and the saints of God will reign over the nations during this time. After this millennial kingdom, Satan will be released for a short time but then he is sentenced to the lake of fire forever. Then the eternal state will begin.

developments regarding the kingdom program. And it is compatible with multiple Bible passages that place the kingdom reign of Christ with His second coming to earth. This premillennial view was the strong consensus position of the Christian church of the first two hundred years. It is a position that is consistent with the biblical worldview which affirms the goodness of God's creation and the restoration of all things material and immaterial that God created (see Col 1:15–20).

Scriptural Support for Premillennialism

The biblical case for premillennialism is multifaceted. In sum, the case for premillennialism can be summarized in three main categories:

- Predictions of a coming reign of the Messiah over the nations on a restored earth *after* a time of worldwide tribulation.
- Old Testament evidence of a period of time—an intermediate kingdom—that is distinct from both the present age and the eternal state.
- Explicit prediction of an intermediate kingdom that is one thousand years long (Rev 20:1–10).

1. Reign of Messiah on Earth after Worldwide Tribulation and Judgment

Amillennialism and postmillennialism place the millennium in this present age between the two comings of Jesus. But several major sections of Scripture indicate that the kingdom of God is *preceded* by certain conditions. These passages speak of a coming unique period of tribulation both for the world and for Israel. In connection with this “tribulation” or “Day of the Lord” are other events such as cosmic signs, the rescue of God's people, the coming of the Lord to earth, and the judgment of God's enemies. These conditions occur before the establishment of the kingdom of God. Thus, an essential claim of premillennialism is that Christ's messianic reign follows these events and does not come before them.

Isaiah 24–25

Isaiah 24–27 is one of the most significant passages in the Old Testament concerning the future. This section is sometimes referred to as “Isaiah's Little Apocalypse” since it gives detailed information concerning events to come and mirrors much of what is found in the book of Revelation. Our focus here will be on chapters 24 and 25 where the pattern of tribulation before kingdom is evident.

Isaiah 24:1–20 details a great worldwide judgment that is coming upon the entire earth and its inhabitants.³ Verse 1 declares: “Behold, the LORD lays the earth

³ That this chapter is referring to a global judgment is also clear from the fact that Isaiah 13–23 discusses the nations of the earth and 24:13 states, “For thus it will be in the midst of the earth among the peoples.”

waste, devastates it, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants.” Verses 5–6 indicate that this time of catastrophic global judgment is because of sin:

The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.

This speaks of global judgment upon the people of the earth who have transgressed God’s standards. But not only are the earth dwellers facing judgment, the earth itself is suffering during this period:

The earth is broken asunder,
The earth is split through,
The earth is shaken violently.
The earth reels to and fro like a drunkard
And it totters like a shack. (Isa 24:19–20b)

So not only are the people of the earth being judged; the planet itself experiences the ramifications of God’s judgments. The time of global tribulation involves judgment on wicked spiritual and earthly forces:

So it will happen in that day,
That the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high,
And the kings of the earth on earth.
They will be gathered together
Like prisoners in the dungeon,
And will be confined in prison;
And after many days they *will be* punished (Isa 24:21–22).

But tribulation and judgment are then followed by kingdom conditions as Isa 25:6–8 reveals:

The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain;
A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,
And refined, aged wine.
And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples,
Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.
He will swallow up death for all time,
And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces,
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;
For the LORD has spoken.

The “banquet” imagery used here refers to God’s kingdom (see Matt 8:11). And the events described here follow the tribulation and judgment previously discussed. Thus, Isaiah 24–25 reveals the following: Global tribulation, *then* judgment, *then* kingdom. This pattern is found in other passages as well.

Daniel 12:1–3

In three concise verses of Dan 12:1–3 we see the pattern of tribulation, judgment, and *then* kingdom:

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt. Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:1 tells of an unparalleled “time of distress” that will come upon Daniel’s people, Israel. This is not just general persecution and tribulation but a unique period that has “never occurred” before. Verse 2 then tells of the judgment of the righteous and the wicked. Verse 3 then states that those who belong to God “will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” This is a reference to the blessings of the kingdom of God. In Matt 13:43, Jesus quoted Dan 12:3 in reference to the righteous at the end of the age who will enter His kingdom. Thus, with Daniel 12:1–3 we see the pattern of tribulation (“time of distress”) *then* judgment *then* kingdom. Or put another way:

- 12:1: Tribulation
- 12:2: Judgment
- 12:3: Kingdom

Zechariah 14

Zechariah 14 is another major passage that discusses future events. Here we see that the kingdom of God follows tribulation, cosmic signs, the rescue of God’s people, and judgment of God’s enemies. The first three verses detail a siege of Jerusalem by the nations:

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut

off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle (14:1–3).

This is a future time of tribulation for Israel as the city is under siege by Gentile powers.⁴ Verse 4 then discusses the return of the Lord to the Mount of Olives:

In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

Note that the Lord comes to the Mount of Olives in front of Jerusalem. This is a literal coming to earth that brings topographical changes to the area. As the siege of the Jerusalem is occurring, things look bleak for its inhabitants before the Lord physically comes to rescue the city. But then He does come to the rescue. The return of the Lord is connected with cosmic signs:

In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light (14:6–7).

Zechariah 14:9 then tells of the kingdom of God: “And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be *the only* one, and His name *the only* one.” This verse is important in that it shows that the Lord’s kingdom comes after a time of tribulation and the Lord’s return to earth. It is also significant because when the King reigns, He reigns “over all the earth.” Thus, there is an earthly kingdom. The nations that were warring against Jerusalem on earth are now displaced by God’s kingdom in the same realm.

Verse 12 then describes judgment for the enemies of God at this time: “Now this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth.” Those who survive this judgment are then allowed to participate in the kingdom that is centered in Jerusalem: “Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.”

In sum, with Zechariah 14, a chronology of events is established: (1) tribulation for Israel; (2) a rescue of God’s people; (3) return of the Lord to earth; (4) cosmic signs; (5) judgment; and then (6) establishment of the kingdom.

⁴ That this section was not fulfilled in A.D. 70 with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem is clear by the fact that Zechariah 14 predicts the rescue of Jerusalem by the Lord who physically comes to the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not delivered nor did the Lord physically return to the Mount of Olives in A.D. 70. Plus, the changes to the land discussed in Zechariah 14 have not occurred.

Matthew 24–25

When one shifts to the New Testament, the pattern is repeated. The kingdom of God follows events such as the Tribulation, cosmic signs, a rescue of God's people, and judgment. For example, in Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus described events in regard to His coming that are similar to those found in the Old Testament. In 24:4–28 Jesus described a coming time of "tribulation" (v. 9). This will include false christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, and plagues (4–8). It also will include persecution of God's people (9–13). This period is also marked by the abomination of desolation that was spoken of by Daniel the prophet (15–22; cf. Dan 9:27). Jesus then detailed cosmic signs, His own coming, and the rescue of His people that will occur immediately after this Tribulation period:

But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other (29–31).

Note the chronology here. Jesus described a unique time of tribulation that is followed by cosmic signs, His own return, and the rescue of God's people. Matthew 25:31–46 is also significant in that Jesus described the judgment of the nations that will take place after His return to earth and just prior to the establishment of the kingdom of God. Particularly significant are verses 31–34 which state:

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Note the chronology here. Jesus comes in His glory with His angels and *then* He sits on "His glorious throne." This is the glorious coming of Jesus from heaven to earth to sit on the Davidic throne. While Jesus is currently at the right hand of God in heaven, it is at the time of His second coming to earth that He assumes the Davidic throne and reigns fully as Messiah on earth. Jesus does not claim that He is sitting on the throne of David before He returns to earth. At this time of Jesus' coming in glory and His assumption of the Davidic throne "all the nations" are "gathered before Him" (v. 32). This is a judgment of the nations that was predicted in Joel 3:12. Unbelievers are referred to as "goats" and believers as "sheep." These

are separated from each other and they enter different destinies. The reward and destiny of the righteous sheep is the kingdom—“Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. . . .” (34). Note that the sheep were not in the kingdom of God before Jesus returned in glory or before the Tribulation period. Instead, the sheep enter the kingdom *after* the Tribulation, *after* Jesus’ return, and *after* the sheep/goat judgment. The judgment of the nations precedes the kingdom of God.

Note the chronology of events according to Matthew 24–25:

Tribulation
Cosmic signs
Return of Jesus
Judgment
Inheriting of the kingdom

With Luke’s account of the Olivet Discourse, the chronology is similar to Matthew 24–25. Luke 21:25–28 states:

“There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Jesus described cosmic signs and “dismay among nations.” Then the Son of Man comes in power and glory. Also significant is what Jesus declared in 21:29–31 where He likened the events of the Tribulation with a fig tree and its leaves and what this meant for the nearness of the kingdom of God:

Then He told them a parable: “Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth *leaves*, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.”

When Jesus said “when you see these things happening” He was referring to the tribulation events He had just described. It is the events of the tribulation that indicate that “the kingdom of God is near.” The kingdom does not run concurrent or before the tribulation—it follows it. There are tribulation events and then the kingdom comes. The dramatic events of the tribulation period mean that the kingdom’s establishment is near. Tribulation gives way to Christ’s kingdom.

This same pattern of tribulation and judgment before kingdom is found in the book of Revelation. Chapters 6–18 describe dramatic events in a tribulation that is followed by the second coming of Jesus, the judgment of God’s enemies including

Satan (19:11—20:1–3) and the reign of the saints with Jesus in His millennial kingdom (20:4–6). Later in this article we will go into more detail on the millennial kingdom in the book of Revelation. But the testimony of both the Old and New Testaments is that certain conditions occur before the Messiah’s reign on earth. These conditions are the Tribulation, cosmic signs, rescue of God’s people, and judgment of God’s enemies. This is strong evidence for the premillennial view.

2. Old Testament Evidence for an Intermediate Kingdom

In his defense of amillennialism against premillennialism, Robert B. Strimple makes mention of “one-text premillennialists”—premillennialists who allegedly rely solely on Revelation 20:1–10 for their view that there will be an earthly kingdom of Christ after the second coming of Jesus.⁵ It is true that there is a common perception that premillennialism is based solely on Revelation 20. Supposedly, without this passage premillennialism would have no biblical support. But the concept of an earthly kingdom after the return of Christ but before the eternal state is consistent with Old Testament prophetic passages as well. While Revelation 20 is the most explicit passage discussing an intermediate kingdom, various passages in the OT support this idea as well. In discussing this point we will see two things. First, Isaiah 24–25 is a backdrop for what is described in Revelation 19 and 20. And second, there are OT passages that suggest an era of time that is different from our present era but also different from the time of the eternal state.

Isaiah 24–25 and Revelation 19 and 20

The book of Revelation corresponds with earlier revelation from the Old Testament. Beale and McDonough are correct that, “The OT in general plays such a major role that a proper understanding of its use is necessary for an adequate view of Revelation as a whole.”⁶ Isaiah in general, and Isaiah’s Little Apocalypse of Isaiah 24–27 in particular, have a strong connection with Revelation. Isaiah’s Little Apocalypse is a major backdrop and part of the informing theology for events of the book of Revelation, including its discussion of a millennial kingdom.

Isaiah 24:1–20

Earlier we discussed the chronology of Isaiah 24–25 in which the kingdom follows worldwide tribulation; here we will discuss Isaiah 24–27 as a specific backdrop for the millennium of the book of Revelation. But first the context must

⁵ Robert B. Strimple, “Amillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 118. Strimple was mostly referring to George Ladd. We are not claiming that Strimple is saying that all premillennialists only claim they have one passage to support premillennialism.

⁶ G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 1082. These authors note that Isaiah is the most used OT book in Revelation (1082).

be established. Isaiah 9:6 predicted that a “son” would come and that “the government will rest on His shoulders.” This is a reference to the coming Messiah. Chapters 13–23 then discuss God’s judgment plan for the nations of the earth. Then Isaiah 24–27 brings together God’s plans for the nations and the plans for this “son” to rule the nations. Isaiah 24:1–20 describes a time of terrible tribulation for the earth and its inhabitants. Verse 1 summarizes the chapter: “Behold, the LORD lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants.” This is not a localized judgment on the land of Israel but universal judgment. The entire earth and its inhabitants are in view here. As Grogan states:

This chapter is fundamental to the three that follow it. It speaks of a judgment that is universal. Not only does it make no reference to particular nations or specific historical events, it does not even restrict the judgment to the earth. This means that it sums up all the judgments on particular nations, as predicted in chapters 13–23, and goes beyond them.⁷

Isaiah 24 corresponds to the global judgments of the book of Revelation (see Rev 1:7; 3:10). This universal judgment occurs because mankind has not obeyed his Creator (24:5). The punishment from God includes the removal of food and drink (v. 7) and rejoicing (v. 8). It also includes desolation in the cities (v. 12). These events correspond to the seal judgments of war, famine, and death discussed in Rev 6:3–8 which also details global judgment to come. Yet while the vast majority of mankind is terrified and shaken from God’s judgments, a remnant of the righteous exists throughout the world who “shout for joy” (14–16a). The once stable planet earth is itself in turmoil. The earth is “split through” and “shaken violently” (v. 19). It “totters like a shack” (v. 20). Revelation 6:12–14 describes “a great earthquake” and “every mountain and island” being removed from their places. What is predicted here in Isaiah 24 coincides with what is described in Revelation, especially chapters 6–19. Isaiah 24 predicts wrath and judgment on the earth and its dwellers; Revelation 6–19 also describes God’s wrath and judgment on the earth and its inhabitants. This sets the scene for the significant section of Isa 24:21–23—a text that has relevance for a coming intermediate kingdom we know as the millennium.

Isaiah 24:21–23

Isaiah 24:21–23 has a strong connection to Revelation 19 and 20 and the concept of an intermediate/millennial kingdom:

On that day the LORD will punish
the host of heaven above
and kings of the earth below.
They will be gathered together

⁷ Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 151.

like prisoners in a pit.
 They will be confined to a dungeon;
 after many days they will be punished.
 The moon will be put to shame
 and the sun disgraced,
 because the LORD of Hosts will reign as king
 on Mount Zion in Jerusalem,
 and He will display His glory
 in the presence of His elders. (Isa 24:21–23, HCSB)

In connection with the worldwide judgment of 24:1–20 this passage (Isa 24:21–23) shows there will be a *two-phase judgment of the enemies of God*. Before we look at this two-staged judgment, though, observe the links between what this passage describes and the events of Revelation 19 and 20:

Isa 24:21 mentions “kings of the earth” that are opposed to God.	Rev 19:19 refers to “kings of the earth” who are opposed to God.
Isa 24:21 states that both the kings of the earth and the host of heaven will be incarcerated.	Rev 19:21 tells of the defeat of the kings of the earth and Rev 20:1–3 tells of the binding of Satan.
Isa 24:22 mentions imprisonment in a dungeon/pit.	Rev 20:1 mentions Satan’s confinement in an “abyss” which is also called a “prison” in 20:7.
Isa 24:22 states that final punishment takes place “after many days.”	Rev 20:7–10 states that after a thousand years Satan is released for a short time and then sentenced to the lake of fire; Rev 20:11–15 states that all unbelieving dead are sentenced to the lake of fire after the thousand years are completed.
Isa 24:23 states the Lord will reign as King.	Rev 20:6 states that Christ will reign for a thousand years.

These parallels show a strong connection between Isaiah 24 and Revelation 19 and 20. Also, Isa 24:23 and its discussion of the moon and sun being diminished also parallels Rev 21:23 which states that the New Jerusalem has no need of the sun or moon to shine on it because of the glory of God through Jesus the Lamb.

Significantly, Isa 24:22 is a backdrop for the millennial kingdom that John will discuss in Revelation 20.⁸ Here Isaiah says that in connection with God’s judgments “the host of heaven” and the “kings of the earth” will be “gathered together” and “confined to a dungeon.” And then he says that their punishment will take place “after many days.” Note that the coming of the Lord and His kingdom means incarceration for these groups but their final judgment is not yet. This

⁸ Beale and McDonough state, “Isaiah 24:21–22 is the basis for 20:2–3 . . . and finds its fulfillment there.” “Revelation,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1145.

mention of “after many days” is significant and seems to point to some intermediate situation—a situation that is explicitly discussed in Rev 20:1–6. As Blaising states, “The structure of the oracle in Isaiah 24–25 indicates some kind of intermediate situation between the coming of God in the Day of the Lord and the everlasting reign in which sin and death are done away completely.”⁹

Isaiah 24:22 does not explicitly promise a “millennium,” but as Grogan rightly notes, “we can at least say that it harmonizes with a premillennial interpretation of Revelation.”¹⁰ Blaising points out, “The many days of imprisonment between the coming of God in the Day of the Lord and the punishment after which the Lord reigns in glory greater than sun or moon bear a correspondence to the millennial period in Revelation 20, which also follows the coming of the Lord in the Day of the Lord”¹¹

Other sections of Isaiah’s Little Apocalypse also correspond to the events of Revelation 19–21:

Isa 25:6 says the Lord “will prepare a lavish banquet” for His people.	Rev 19:9 says God’s people “are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”
Isa 25:8 says the Lord “will swallow up death for all time.”	Rev 21:4 says “there will no longer be any death.”
Isa 25: 8 states that the Lord God “will wipe tears away from all faces.”	Rev 21:4 states, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes” and “there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain.”
Isa 26:11 says “fire will devour your enemies.”	Rev 19:20; 20:9–10; and 20:14–15 mention God’s enemies facing fiery judgment.
Isa 26:19 predicts bodily resurrection—“Your dead will live; their corpses will rise.”	Rev 20:4 says God’s people “came to life.”
Isa 27:1 predicts the punishment of the Leviathan serpent and the dragon who lives in the sea.	Rev 20:2 states that Christ will incarcerate “the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan.”

Two points are worthy of note here. First, the use of Isaiah 24–27 in Revelation shows that the message of Revelation harmonizes with the message of Isaiah 24–27. What Isaiah predicted is also what Revelation foretells. Second, Isaiah 24–27 is a backdrop for the millennial kingdom discussed in Revelation 20.

⁹ Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 203.

¹⁰ Grogan, “Isaiah,” in *EBC*, 155.

¹¹ Blaising, 203.

Intermediate Kingdom Conditions Predicted in the OT

Revelation 19:11–21:8 tells of an intermediate era between the present age and the eternal state. But in addition to Revelation 20, several Old Testament passages predict an era on this earth that is far better than the current age we live in but not yet as perfect as the coming final eternal state. Thus, there is a necessity of an intermediate kingdom after the second coming of Jesus but before the eternal state. As Wayne Grudem puts it:

Several Old Testament passages seem to fit neither in the present age nor in the eternal state. These passages indicate some future stage in the history of redemption which is far greater than the present church age but which still does not see the removal of all sin and rebellion and death from the earth.¹²

Isaiah 65:20

One such passage that points to an intermediate period is Isaiah 65. While discussing eschatological events verse 20 states:

No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

The issue at hand in this verse, which is discussing conditions associated with the new heavens and new earth (cf. Isa 65:17), is longevity of life. When this prophecy is fulfilled people will be living so long that if they die at age 100, something must be wrong since people will live much longer than that. In fact, it will be assumed that a person dying at the age of 100 must have done something wrong. They must be “accursed.” So notice two important things here with Isa 65:20—an increased longevity of life and the presence of sin which brings curses and death.

Now we must ask the question, “When in history have these conditions described in Isa 65:20 occurred? Can it be during our present age?” The answer is clearly, no. We live in a day where people live between 70–80 years on average (see Ps 90:10). If a person dies today at age 100 we say he lived a long life, not a short one. So will Isa 65:20 be fulfilled in the coming eternal state? The answer again must be, no. In the eternal state there is no longer any sin, death, or curse (Rev 21:4; 22:3), so no one will be dying. Therefore, Isa 65:20 must be fulfilled in an era that is different from our current period yet distinct from the eternal state. This means there must be an intermediate kingdom or what we call a millennium. Compare the three eras:

¹² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1127.

<u>Present Age:</u>	Lifespans of 70–80 years
<u>Millennial Kingdom:</u>	Lifespans well beyond 70–80 years but death still occurs.
<u>Eternal State:</u>	People live forever with no presence of sin, death, or curse.

This understanding of Isaiah 65 being a reference to a millennium is not recent. Christians of the second century viewed this passage as support for premillennialism. Martin Erdmann points out that Isa 65:20–25 formed “the scriptural basis, besides Revelation 20:1–10, on which Asiatic millennialism built its chiliastic doctrine.”¹³ This was also true for Justin Martyr. In reference to Isaiah 65 Justin said, “For Isaiah spoke thus concerning this period of a thousand years.”¹⁴ Erdmann points out that Justin’s reference to Old Testament prophets “indicates his reliance on the Old Testament as the primary source of his chiliasm. He did not shy away from utilizing different passages from the Hebrew Bible to strengthen his argument in favor of a literal millennium.”¹⁵ Likewise, the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas* was a premillennialist, and according to Erdmann, “his chiliastic views are partially based on verses from the Old Testament.”¹⁶

Zechariah 8

Zechariah 8 offers some descriptions of God’s coming kingdom when Jesus returns. The chapter begins with God restoring Jerusalem. With “great wrath” and “jealousy” (8:2) the Lord returns to Zion and dwells in Jerusalem (8:3). The great city will have another name—“City of Truth” (8:3). This capital city of God’s kingdom will be characterized by sweet peace and fellowship, as the Lord himself says:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets” (Zech 8:4–5).

When the Lord comes again and reigns from Jerusalem, the elderly and young people will be talking and playing in the streets. It appears that age and age discrepancies still exist when the Lord’s kingdom is established. Old men and women at this time need the aid of a staff “because of age.” They possess some weakness because of advanced years. This suggests the concept of an intermediate kingdom (or millennium), an era that is different from the present evil age but different also from the eternal state in which all negative aspects of aging and death

¹³ Martin Erdmann, *The Millennial Controversy in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 118.

¹⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 80, 1:239.

¹⁵ Erdmann, 138.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

are removed. From Zechariah's time until now there has never been a time where the conditions of Zechariah 8 have happened. On the other hand, there will be no elderly who are weak in the final eternal state for all remnants of the curse have been removed (see Revelation 21 and 22). What Zechariah describes here, therefore, must take place in an initial phase of God's kingdom before the eternal state begins. Such an intermediate state between the present age and the eternal state is described in Revelation 20 where a thousand-year reign of Christ is emphasized.

Zechariah 14

Zechariah 14 also supports premillennialism. It describes kingdom conditions after the return of Jesus to earth. Verse 9 states that the "LORD will be King over all the earth" after His feet stand on the Mount of Olives (v. 4), but there is still disobedience and rebellion on the part of some nations. It is predicted that Egypt and other nations will be punished with drought when they do not obey the Lord as they should:

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no *rain will fall* on them; it will be the plague with which the LORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Zech 14:16–19).

Grudem states the issue well when he points out that the sin and punishment of the nations after Jesus returns does not fit the present age or the eternal state:

Here again the description does not fit the present age, for the Lord is King over all the earth in this situation. But it does not fit the eternal state either, because of the disobedience and rebellion against the Lord that is clearly present.¹⁷

Thus, the events of Zechariah 14 best fit with a premillennial understanding of the kingdom. While people from all nations are being saved in the present age, the nations themselves do not obey our Lord (see Psalm 2). In fact, they persecute those who belong to the Lord. In the millennial kingdom Jesus will rule the nations while He is physically present on earth. The nations will obey and submit to His rule, but as Zechariah 14 points out, whenever a nation does act as they should there is punishment. On the other hand, in the eternal state there will be absolutely no

¹⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1129.

disobedience on the part of the nations. The picture of the nations in the eternal state is only positive. The kings of the nations bring their contributions to the New Jerusalem (see Rev 21:24) and the leaves of the tree of life are said to be for the healing of the nations (see Rev 22:2). To compare:

<u>Present Age:</u>	Jesus is in heaven and the nations do not yet submit to Jesus as King.
<u>Millennial Kingdom:</u>	Jesus rules the nations on earth and punishes those nations that do not act as they should.
<u>Eternal State:</u>	The nations act exactly as they should with no need of punishment.

The idea of an earthly kingdom that comes after Jesus' return but before the eternal state is consistent with several Old Testament passages. In the course of progressive revelation, Revelation 20 will reveal to us how long this intermediate kingdom will be ("a thousand years"), but it is not the first and only reference to such an era. When someone says, "You have only one passage, Revelation 20, which allegedly teaches a millennium," the answer is, "That's not true. Revelation 20 tells us how long Christ's intermediate earthly kingdom will be—one thousand years—but other passages teach the idea of an intermediate kingdom." Premillennialism, therefore, is a doctrine found in both the Old and New testaments.¹⁸

3. Explicit Mention of a Millennium in Revelation 19–20

The biblical case for premillennialism also includes Revelation 20, for it is here that an intermediate kingdom of one-thousand years is explicitly revealed. The millennium is found in Rev 20:1–10:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first

¹⁸ I purposely have not discussed many New Testament passages that are consistent with premillennialism such as Matt 19:28; 25:31; Acts 1:6; Rev 5:10 and others that place the coming of the kingdom in the future at the time of the second coming. The main point to show here is that the Old Testament teaches the idea of an intermediate earthly kingdom.

resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

This section can be summarized as follows:

- Satan will be bound and all his activities are completely ceased for a thousand years (1–3).
- Positions of kingdom authority were granted to previously martyred saints (4).
- These martyrs who were slain for the testimony of Jesus are resurrected and reign with Christ for a thousand years (4).
- Another group, “the rest of the dead,” came to life one thousand years later (5).
- Those who are part of the first resurrection are priests of God and Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years (6).
- At the end of the thousand years Satan is released and leads a rebellion that is immediately defeated with fire from heaven (7–10).

That this millennium is both earthly and future can be understood from several aspects. Before looking at this section, though, some information about the genre of the book of Revelation must be understood.

Genre—Prophecy

The book of Revelation describes what John experienced and saw via divine revelation:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw (Rev 1:1–2).

What John receives is a “revelation” (*apokalupsis*) of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is pictured as a revealer of information that God wanted revealed to His

servants.¹⁹ Jesus “communicated” or “signified” this revelation by an angel to John.²⁰ Jesus then refers to the prophetic nature of this revelation to be given:

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it (Rev 1:3a).

The nature of this revelation is “prophecy.” In continuity with the prophets of the Old Testament, John received divinely inspired revelation that is prophetic in nature. This is a case, therefore, where the genre of the book of Revelation is explicitly stated. The genre is *prophecy*. Often much is made of the alleged “apocalyptic” nature of Revelation in which John supposedly wrote in the style of non-inspired Jewish apocalyptic writers of his era. Such discussion is complicated by the fact that there is considerable disagreement concerning how to define “apocalyptic genre.” It is also complicated by the fact that the book of Revelation has elements in it that do not fit with the traditional understanding of “apocalyptic.” For instance, with apocalyptic literature the real author is not known, but in the case of Revelation we know its author—John. Also, Revelation has an epistolary section to it (chaps. 2–3), something other apocalyptic literature writings do not have.

So is there no relation between the book of Revelation and apocalyptic genre? The answer to this question depends on what one means by apocalyptic. If one identifies apocalyptic as divine revelation about the future in the form of visions and symbols to a prophet under divine inspiration, then, yes, the book of Revelation is apocalyptic. So too were OT prophetic books such as Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. But if one views John as mimicking the genre of other Jewish apocalyptic writers of his day who were not inspired then there are major problems.²¹ First, unlike the Jewish apocalyptic writers, John was writing under inspiration from God. The contents of John’s writings are not coming from his own mind but from actual revelations from God. And unlike other apocalyptic writers of his era, John did not sit down to intentionally write cryptic messages. He did not say to himself, “I need to give my people encouragement in difficult times so I am going to use cryptic symbols to encourage them.” If we take John at His word, he is simply writing down what God revealed to him via an angel of God. And unlike

¹⁹ There is some issue as to whether Jesus is the One being revealed or the One who is doing the revealing. The latter view is more likely. As Thomas states, “it refers to data that Jesus Christ was inspired by God to reveal to His servants.” Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 52.

²⁰ Some claim that the word “signify” (*semaino*) is an indicator that the contents of the revelation are to be understood non-literally or symbolically. But this is reading too much into the term. The meaning here is that Jesus is going to “show,” “announce” or “declare” the contents of the revelation without indicating that there are cryptic meanings behind the terms used.

²¹ Ladd observes that “apocalyptic writings appeared between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100, which purported to bring revelations from God explaining the reason for the prevalence of evil, disclosing heavenly secrets, and promising the imminent coming of His kingdom and the salvation of the afflicted.” George E. Ladd, “Apocalyptic,” in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. by J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 1:43. 1 Enoch, Jubilees, the Assumption of Moses, 4 Ezra, 2 Esdras, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs were written during this time.

others, he is doing so under inspiration. For those who accept the supernatural nature of the Bible this should be no surprise. For John to see the resurrected Jesus who gives spectacular visions with vivid symbols representing literal truths is consistent with a revealing God. Other sections of Revelation confirm the prophetic nature of the book of Revelation:

Blessed is he who heeds the words of the *prophecy* of this book (Rev 22:7).

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the *prophecy* of this book, for the time is near” (Rev 22:10).

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the *prophecy* of this book . . .” (Rev 22:18a).

“and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this *prophecy* . . .” (Rev 22:19a)

In light of these verses, we do not have to guess what kind of literature Revelation is. The book of Revelation, including the millennium of Revelation 20:1–6, is prophecy. Some of the details of this prophecy will be given in the form of symbols, but behind these symbols are literal truths.

Literary Structure

Where do the events of Revelation 20 fit within the overall structure of Revelation? Below is a listing of the major sections of Revelation:

Prologue	1:1–1:8
Letters to Seven Churches	1:9–3:22
Heavenly Court and Its Judgment	4:1–11:19
Prophetic/Apocalyptic Narrative	12:1–16:21
Fall of Babylon	17:1–19:10
Prophetic/Apocalyptic Narrative	19:11–21:8
New Jerusalem Established	21:9–22:9
Epilogue	22:10–22:21

John’s discussion of the millennium comes within the literary section of 19:11–21:8, a section that describes the return of Jesus and chronological events after His return. Here John uses the expression *kai eidon* eight times (19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1). *Kai eidon* can be translated “and I saw” or “then I saw.” This expression can refer to chronological progression which seems to be the case here. As Robert Mounce observed, “It should be noted that the recurring ‘and I saw’ of 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 12; and 21:1 appears to establish a sequence of visions which

carries through from the appearance of the Rider on the white horse (19:11) to the establishment of the new heaven and new earth (21:1ff).”²²

As the events within 19:11–21:8 unfold, John tells of several things he saw in succession, one after the other:

19:11–16: John saw (“And I saw”) the return of Christ with the armies of heaven to strike down Christ’s enemies and rule the nations.

19:17–18: Then John saw (“Then I saw”) an angel in heaven calling to the birds to eat the flesh of the enemies of Christ.

19:19–21 Then John saw (“And I saw”) the beast and the armies of the earth wage war against the returning Christ; the beast and the false prophet are seized and thrown into the lake of fire and the rest of the enemies are slain.

20:1–3: Then John saw (“Then I saw”) an angel coming from heaven with a great chain to bind Satan and throws him into the pit where his evil activities are totally ceased.

20:4–10: Then John saw (“Then I saw”) thrones established, the resurrection of the martyrs and their reigning with Christ for a thousand years, and the rest of the dead coming to life after the thousand years are completed. After the thousand-year period is over, Satan is released from his prison and leads a rebellion of nations against God’s people and the holy city. Satan is defeated and thrown into the lake of fire.

20:11: Then John saw (“Then I saw”) a great white throne established that could not be escaped.

20:12–15: Then John saw (“And I saw”) the great and the small judged, with those whose names were not found in the book of life being cast into the lake of fire; death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

21:1–8: Then John saw (“Then I saw”) a new heaven and a new earth and the coming of the New Jerusalem.

The main point here is that in Revelation 19:11–21:8, John describes the second coming of Jesus and the events that follow it. This includes the thousand-year reign of Christ of Rev 20:1–10. The events of Rev 20:1–10 follow the second coming of Jesus described in Rev 19:11. There is sequential progression, not recapitulation in this section.

This understanding is a logical conclusion based on a section that is describing a chronological progression of events. As Craig Blaising observes, “It is noteworthy

²² Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 352.

. . . that when the issue of theological–historical significance is suspended and the question is strictly literary, there is general agreement that the events in the visions of 19:11–21:8 are correlative with or consequent to the Parousia of 19:11.”²³

Six of the eight visions that start with “and/then I saw” in 19:11–21:8 are commonly viewed as happening at the time of or after the events of the *parousia* as described in 19:11. The only two debated ones are 20:1–3 and 4–7, which describe the binding of Satan and the reign of the saints. Amillennialists and postmillennialists place these sections between the two comings of Jesus. But is it not simpler to understand all eight sections as describing events after the coming of Jesus? We think it is arbitrary to claim six of these are post-*parousia*, but two of them recapitulate. Blaising is correct that, “The presumption is in favor of viewing the remaining two visions [found in 20:1–6] in a similar manner.” Mounce is also accurate that “The interpretation that discovers recapitulation for the segment 20:1–6 must at least bear the burden of proof.”²⁴

Also, the chronological understanding based on a proper understanding of the literary context makes most sense of what is being described in Revelation 19 and 20. This section tells of the defeat of the false trinity that is opposed to God—Satan, the beast, and the false prophet. As the beast and the false prophet are defeated by the returning Christ in 19:19–21, the natural question involves what will happen to Satan who is the power behind the beast and the false prophet. A chronological progression view understands that at this time of Christ’s return Satan will be dealt with too. Off the heels of the defeat of the beast and the false prophet, Rev 20:1–3 finds Satan being incarcerated. This means that all three enemies are defeated with the return of King Jesus.

But if one insists on stating that Revelation 19 is about the second coming of Jesus, yet Rev 20:1 kicks the reader back to the beginning of the church age, then there is a disconnect in how God deals with His ultimate enemies. In this odd scenario, Satan is bound at the beginning of the church age (sort of), but the beast and the false prophet who are empowered by Satan are not defeated until the second coming of Jesus. It seems better to view all three members of the false trinity dealt with at the same time. Thus, the best reading indicates that Christ appears from heaven (19:11–19), He destroys His enemies, including the beast and the false prophet (19:20–21), and then He deals with the third member of the false trinity, Satan, by binding him and casting him into the abyss (20:1–3). Blomberg summarizes this well:

In the process, we are told about the fate of two of the three members of the so-called satanic trinity introduced in 12:1–13:18. The beast and the false prophet, parodies of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, are captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire (19:20). Readers expect to hear next about the fate of the ringleader of the three, Satan himself, the one who wanted to usurp the place of God the Father, and they are not disappointed. Revelation 20:1 continues

²³ Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, 213.

²⁴ Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 352.

seamlessly, describing Satan's confinement to the abyss until the very end of the millennium. The rest of the chapter follows equally inexorably from there on.²⁵

George Ladd also was correct when he declared, "There is absolutely no hint of any recapitulation in chapter 20."²⁶ And as Blomberg has aptly stated, "No matter how many flashbacks or disruptions of chronological sequence one might want to argue for elsewhere in Revelation, it makes absolutely no sense to put one in between Revelation 19 and 20 as both amillennialists and postmillennialists must do."²⁷

The Binding of Satan

Another reason for holding to a future and earthly understanding of the millennium of Revelation 20 is the nature of the binding of Satan described in Rev 20:1–3. This passage describes an incarceration of Satan which results in a complete cessation of his activities:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

The language here is powerful. Note several truths concerning what happens to Satan:

1. Satan is "bound."
2. Satan is thrown into the abyss.
3. The abyss that Satan is placed in is "shut" and "sealed" over him.

Much attention often is given to whether the activities of Satan are curtailed or ceased, but before one even considers the activities of Satan, one must recognize what is happening to Satan himself, as a personal being. Satan himself is incarcerated and confined in a real place, a place called "the abyss." *Our point here is not just that a specific function of Satan (i.e. deceiving nations) is hindered; Satan himself is absolutely confined to a place that results in a complete cessation of all that he does.* Satan is imprisoned. He used to be able to inflict his evil ways on the earth but now he is no longer able to do so because his presence is

²⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, "The Posttribulationism of the New Testament," in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to 'Left Behind' Eschatology*, eds., Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 68.

²⁶ George Eldon Ladd, "An Historical Premillennial Response," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 1977), 190.

²⁷ Blomberg, 67.

transferred to the abyss. In Rev 9:1–3 the “bottomless pit” or “abyss” was a place that locust-like beings were confined. But their release from the abyss meant they were free to do their damaging activities “upon the earth” (9:3). On the flip side, while they were in the abyss they were not free to do anything on the earth. With the account of the demoniac in Luke 8, many demons pleaded with Jesus so they would not be sent to the “abyss” (8:31). It seems that they were afraid of being removed from having any presence or influence on earth and not just a curtailing of their activities to some degree. With this understanding that Satan himself has been taken from the earth to imprisonment in the abyss, conclusions can be made concerning what this means for his activities.

Since Satan is confined to the abyss it can be said that one of his major activities—deceiving the nations—ceased as well. But as we saw, the main reason Satan is no longer able to deceive the nations is because he is in prison with no access to the earth. *Imprisonment of a person means a cessation of that person’s works.* To use an example, if a law enforcement officer arrests a serial killer who terrorized a city and puts him in prison we could say, “This wicked person has been jailed so that he cannot continue with his murdering ways.” Such a statement does not mean only that this person’s murdering activities are curtailed. Nor does it mean that he is free to rape and rob. That would be absurd. His incarceration as a person means his wicked ways have totally stopped. Likewise, the binding of Satan means for the first time in human history mankind will not have to deal with Satan’s deceptive tactics. That is why Mounce is correct when he states: “The elaborate measures taken to insure his [Satan’s] custody are most easily understood as implying the complete cessation of his influence on earth (rather than a curbing of his activities).”²⁸

This truth that Satan is totally incarcerated during the millennium is not compatible with the views of amillennialism and postmillennialism. Both of these positions assert that the millennium is present during this present age and that Satan is present and active. His limitation is that he is not able to stop the gospel from going to the nations. This view, though, is wrong. The Scripture indicates that Satan’s ability to deceive is alive and well in this present age:

2 Cor 4:4: “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

1 Pet 5:8: “Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

1 John 5:19: “the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one.”

²⁸ Mounce, 353.

These passages, which were written by three apostles after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, make clear that Satan is still actively involved in worldwide deception. Plus, the book of Revelation itself explicitly states that before Jesus returns, Satan is actively deceiving the nations, with much success. Revelation 12:9 declares:

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

The sphere of Satan's deception before Jesus returns is "the whole world." This worldwide deception over the nations is again discussed in Rev 13:2, 7–8:

And the dragon [Satan] gave him [the Beast] his power and his throne and great authority . . . It was also given to him [the Beast] to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. All who dwell on the earth will worship him.

Satan is the energizing power behind the beast who has authority over "every tribe and people and tongue and nation." Thus, in the time period between the two comings of Jesus, Satan is characterized by deceiving every people group. This is why the binding of Satan described in Rev 20:1–3 is so dramatic and historic. Before Jesus comes again Satan's deceptive power over the nations is strong but in one moment his ability to deceive the nations will end. This passage directly contradicts any theology that says that Satan's ability to deceive the nations is bound today. As Wayne Grudem points out, "It seems more appropriate to say that Satan is *now* still deceiving the nations, but at the beginning of the millennium this deceptive influence will be removed."²⁹

Those who assert that the binding of Satan is taking place in this present age between the two comings of Jesus link the events of Rev 20:1–3 with Jesus' victory over Satan at the cross. Of course it is true that the Bible indicates that Jesus was victorious over Satan at the cross. Yet the cosmic battle between God and Satan includes a progression of events that eventually culminates in Satan's imprisonment in the lake of fire (see Rev 20:10). Just as a major war between two nations can involve many battles, so too, the battle between God and Satan involves several battles, with God's victory involving several events:

1. Satan judged and cast down from heaven before the fall of man (Isa 14:12–15 and Ezek 28:11–19).
2. Jesus' demonstrations of power over Satan's realm through his casting out of demons (Matt 12:28).
3. Jesus' victory over Satan at the cross (Col 2:15)

²⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1118.

4. Satan thrown to the earth for a short time shortly before the return of Jesus (Revelation 12).
5. Satan bound in the pit for one thousand years at the return of Jesus (Rev 20:1–3).
6. Satan sent to the lake of fire forever after the one thousand year reign of Jesus (Rev 20:7–10).

These events above are separate but interrelated events in the cosmic war. But the binding of Satan described in Rev 20:1–3 occurs after Jesus returns to earth at His second coming, not before.

Two Physical Resurrections

Another evidence for a future understanding of the millennium is found in the two resurrections of Rev 20:4–5. *The fulfillment of these two resurrections is future from our standpoint in history; this shows that the millennium is future as well.*

In verse 4, John says that “the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus . . . came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” This group of souls who were beheaded is the same group of martyrs that came out of the great tribulation described in Revelation 6. Thus, there is an inherent connection between the martyrs of Revelation 6 and the martyrs who are resurrected in Revelation 20.

Revelation 6:9–11 describes the fifth seal which is the martyrdom of God’s people who were slain because of their commitment to the Word of God and their testimony for Jesus (see Rev 6:9). This solemn passage tells of the condition of the souls of these martyred saints. Their state is not that of “reigning.” Instead, it is one of crying to the Lord for the avenging of their lives. These saints were killed for their testimony on the earth. And now their souls are in heaven and they are crying out, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (6:10). Verse 11 then states that these martyrs were clothed in white and told to “rest for a little while longer” until the full number of martyred saints was completed. These saints are not involved in a kingdom reign; instead, they are eagerly calling on the Lord to deal with their enemies who killed them. The response given to them is to wait for awhile.

The frustration of these saints comes to an end, though, with the events of Revelation 19 and 20. Revelation 5:10 promised a coming day when the saints would reign upon the earth: “You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” Now this day that the saints hoped for is coming true. The enemies of Jesus receive judgment. And with the Lord’s return, His saints will reign with him. This is the picture presented in Rev 20:4–6.

Revelation 19:11–21 tells of the return of Jesus and the vanquishing of His enemies. Revelation 20:1–3 details the complete cessation of the activities of Satan. Then verse 4 tells us that thrones are established, indicating a kingdom reign. Then we are told that the martyred saints “came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” These are the same people who lost their physical lives in Rev

6:9–11. But now these people come to life. The term for “came to life” is *ezezan*, a word used of Jesus’ bodily resurrection in Revelation 2:8. Here Jesus referred to himself as, “The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life (*ezezan*).” The coming to life that Jesus is talking about is not spiritual salvation since Jesus did not need to be saved. Instead, His was a physical resurrection, a physical coming to life. The Jesus who was killed physically is the same Jesus who was raised physically from the dead. Likewise, these martyrs for the cause of Jesus who had physically died (Rev 6:9–11) are now physically made alive (Rev 20:4).

Verse 5 then states, “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.” We are introduced now to another group called “the rest of the dead.” This is a different and much broader group than the one mentioned in verse 4. It is said of this second group that they did not “come to life” until the thousand years were over.

Again, the term for “come to life,” *ezezan*, is used. Since *ezezan* referred to physical resurrection in verse 4 it is highly likely that *ezezan* refers to physical resurrection in verse 5. Such a conclusion is based on strong contextual and historical/grammatical considerations, for it is likely that the term *ezezan* would be used similarly in such close proximity. Thus, a thousand years after the first group was physically resurrected this second group experiences physical resurrection. For the second group, though, this physical resurrection is unto eternal judgment. Verse 6 states, “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” This states that those who experience the first resurrection will not experience what is called “the second death.” But those who are part of the second resurrection after the thousand years are affected by “the second death.” This second death is linked with the lake of fire (20:14) that comes as a result of the great white throne judgment of Rev 20:11–15.

Amillennialists and postmillennialists have claimed that the first reference to *ezezan* (“came to life”) is a spiritual resurrection while the second reference to *ezezan* is a physical resurrection. The problem with this understanding is evident. That this term, *ezezan*, could be used in two different senses in such close proximity seems most improbable. Martyrs who have given their life to Christ are not in need of spiritual resurrection. They are already saved. That is why they gave their lives for Jesus in the first place. But martyrs who have lost their physical lives to God’s enemies are in need of a physical resurrection, and this is what Revelation 20:4 promises. Amillennialists and postmillennialists admit that the second resurrection of Rev 20:5 cannot be a spiritual resurrection for if it were, this would be teaching universalism, the view that all people will be saved. But if the second resurrection is a physical resurrection what contextual reasons are there for claiming that the first resurrection of 20:4 is spiritual as the amillennialists and postmillennialists affirm? To claim that the resurrection of verse 4 is spiritual but the resurrection of verse 5 is physical stretches the limits of credibility.

To avoid the obvious, some have asserted that when it comes to the two resurrections it is not chronology that is in view but the *quality* of the resurrections. Thus, the first resurrection is a kind of resurrection in which the focus is on spiritual salvation, while the second resurrection is in the category of physical resurrection.

Yet such a view does injustice to the immediate context which is very time-oriented. The eight “and I saw” (*kai eidon*) markers in Rev 19:11–21:8 indicate chronology. And even more striking is that the second resurrection is said to follow the first resurrection by a “thousand years,” showing that time is in view. So to deemphasize chronology here is a major violation of the context.

Thus, it is best to conclude that the martyrs who were killed for the sake of Jesus receive a physical resurrection while a thousand years later there will be a physical resurrection for another group. All of this argues for a future millennium. *If the first resurrection of Rev 20:4–5 is a physical resurrection then the millennium of Revelation 20 must be future, following the second coming of Jesus in Revelation 19. Since physical resurrection of saints has not occurred in history, such a resurrection must be a future event and cannot be something fulfilled in the inter-advent age.* Thus, Rev 20:4–5 is powerful evidence for the idea that there will be an intermediate age, a millennium, after the second coming of Jesus but before the final eternal state.

Church History

The last point to be made here is in regard to church history. I put this point last since the main arguments for a theological view should stem from Scripture. Yet there is an important point from history that should be considered by those evaluating the millennium issue. *The point is this—for over two hundred years after the writing of Revelation by the apostle John, the strong consensus of the early church was that the millennium John spoke of was earthly and future.* Or in other words, the church held to premillennialism. As the historian Philip Schaff declared:

The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius.³⁰

After stating that “The Book of Revelation offers an example of a theology which is at the heart of earliest Christian conviction rather than being marginal to it,” Christopher Rowland points out, “Millennial beliefs were still widely held from the second century onward, as is evident in the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Lactantius.”³¹

It is also helpful to look at the millennial beliefs of those who had some connection with the apostle John, the author of Revelation 20:1–10. In addition, it is

³⁰ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 2:614.

³¹ Christopher Rowland, “The Eschatology of the New Testament Church,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 68–69.

beneficial to examine the beliefs of those in close geographical proximity to Asia Minor where the apostle John lived later in his life. *We think it probable that those who had a close association with John would also have a correct understanding of what John meant by the millennium.*

Papias (A.D. 60–130) was Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, Asia Minor. He was a contemporary of Polycarp.³² According to Martin Erdmann, Papias “represented a chiliastic tradition which had its antecedents in Palestine.”³³ Papias’s dependence on the oral teachings of the apostles and elders has been documented by both Irenaeus and Eusebius.³⁴ Eusebius points out that Papias received “doctrines of the faith” that came from the “friends” of the twelve apostles.³⁵ Eusebius also said of Papias, “It is worth while observing here that the name John is twice enumerated by him. The first one he mentions in connection with Peter and James and Matthew and the rest of the apostles, clearly meaning the evangelist.”³⁶ Papias, thus, saw himself as possessing the teachings of the apostles. As Eusebius notes, “And Papias, of whom we are now speaking, confesses that he received the words of the apostles from those that followed them.”³⁷ Irenaeus also refers to Papias as “a hearer of John.”³⁸

It appears, therefore, that Papias had close connections with the apostles and John the apostle in particular. So did he hold a particular millennial view? He did—Papias was a premillennialist. Eusebius records that Papias believed things that “came to him from unwritten tradition” and “teachings of the Saviour.” Among these beliefs were “that there will be a millennium after the resurrection of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this earth.”³⁹ Thus, with Papias we have a case of a Christian who had close access to John the apostle and was convinced that the kingdom of Christ was future and earthly.

Next, Irenaeus (c. 130–c. 202) was born in Asia Minor and later became the Bishop of Lyons. As a youth Irenaeus listened to Polycarp, who probably had personal contact with John and other apostles.⁴⁰ Irenaeus was not as directly associated with John as Papias, but the historical connection through Polycarp is still significant. Irenaeus knew someone who knew the apostle John. As with Papias, Irenaeus was also a strong believer in premillennialism. In fact, premillennialism was a major weapon in Irenaeus’s battle against Gnosticism and

³² Polycarp (A.D. 70–155) was Bishop of Smyrna and most important for our purposes, was a disciple of John the apostle. Because of his connection to the apostle John, Polycarp was viewed as a protector of true doctrine. According to Irenaeus, Polycarp was converted to Christianity by the apostles. He was made a bishop and had communicated with many who testified that they had seen Jesus.

³³ Erdmann, *The Millennial Controversy*, 107. For our purposes here, we are following the lead of Erdmann in viewing chiliasm and premillennialism as mostly synonymous.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III. 39.2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.7.

³⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V. 33.4.

³⁹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 39.11–12.

⁴⁰ Erdmann, 108.

its unbiblical dualism between matter and spirit.⁴¹ Irenaeus used premillennialism and the idea of an earthly kingdom to fight the gnostic view that matter was evil that and God was not interested in redeeming the earth. Erdmann points out that “The book *Adversus Haereses* is also one of the most important sources of millennial expositions in the ante-Nicene literature.”⁴²

So with the cases of Papias and Irenaeus we have two people who had a historical connection with John the apostle who affirmed premillennialism. Is it possible that these two men were simply wrong about the millennium? Did they misunderstand John? Of course it is possible, but is it likely? We think not.⁴³ It is more likely that they held to premillennialism because John himself taught this view.

Those in geographical proximity to John also believed in premillennialism. John lived his later years at Ephesus in Asia Minor. Erdmann refers to the premillennialism of Asia Minor in the second century as “Asiatic millennialism.”⁴⁴ He also notes that “the decisive authority of Asiatic millennialism is John, from whom the elders claimed to have obtained their information. Moreover, John, as again stated by Papias, ascribed the origin of millenarianism to Christ.”⁴⁵ Thus, the evidence indicates that Christians of Asia Minor held to premillennialism. Others associated with Asiatic millennialism include Tertullian, Commodian, and Lactantius. If premillennialism was the intended view of John the apostle, it seems natural to think that those who knew him or had a close association with him would also affirm premillennialism. And, if John the apostle lived in Asia Minor, it appears likely that those Christians near his area of influence also would have similar views as John on the millennium. We cannot be absolutely certain of these estimations, but they do appear probable. On the other hand, for amillennialism or postmillennialism to be correct, we have to believe that those who had close connections with John, either personally or geographically, were woefully wrong with their views of the millennium. In our view, this is possible but not probable.

Scripture, not church history, determines the correctness of a theological view. But it seems to us that the historical argument is on the side of premillennialism since people close to John held premillennial views and premillennialism was the overwhelming view of those in Asia Minor and the church as a whole of the second century.⁴⁶

⁴¹ For a detailed discussion of how Irenaeus used premillennialism as a weapon against Gnosticism see Erdmann, 107–29.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴³ Eusebius himself believed Papias was mistaken.

⁴⁴ Erdmann., *The Millennial Controversy*, 107–134.

⁴⁵ Erdmann, 111.

⁴⁶ We are not saying that every single Christian of the second century was a premillennialist, but premillennialism was clearly the dominant view.

Conclusion

The testimony of Scripture is clear—the millennial kingdom of Jesus the Messiah is earthly and future from our standpoint in history. The Old Testament offers evidence for an intermediate kingdom, and this intermediate kingdom is explicitly stated to be one thousand years according to Rev 20:1–10. In addition, the consensus of the early church was that Jesus' millennial reign was both earthly and future. The truth of premillennialism should cause all Christians to pray what Jesus taught us to pray in Matt 6:10: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.”