

A Look at Revelation 20 in Light of Literal-Millennial-Reign Preterism

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IN DEUTERONOMY 28, GOD threatened His people with a multitude of curses if they failed to follow His law. Every single curse listed in Deuteronomy 28 happened throughout the course of the Jewish War. Deuteronomy 28:63 promised that the Jewish people would be removed from Israel. The same message is implied in the parable of the vinedressers (Mark 12). In this parable, there is a vineyard representing Jerusalem, and the son of the vineyard's owner is Jesus, who is killed outside of the vineyard (Mark 12:8). Mark 12:9 then goes on to say that God, the owner of the vineyard, would kill the tenants, the adulterous Jews living in Jerusalem, and give the vineyard, Jerusalem, to others: "*What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.*" The *others* who are given the vineyard, Jerusalem, in Mark 12:9 obviously represent Christians. This symbolic prediction did, in fact, occur literally and historically in post-war Jerusalem.

Interestingly, in the 1000 years after the Jewish War, there was a dramatic shift in demographics in Judea. Once populated almost exclusively by ethnic Jews, Judea was 95% Christian by AD 614.¹ This was, in a large part, because of the expulsion of many Jews after the Jewish War and the second Jewish revolt, the Bar Kokhba Rebellion. After the second Jewish revolt, in order to eliminate the possibility of future insurrections, Hadrian ordered the exile of the remaining Jews in Judea. After this war, few Jewish settlements remained with the exception of three areas in the Jordan valley.² Jerusalem was then renamed Aelia Capitoline and racial Jews were not permitted to approach the city upon threat of execution—just as implied in Mark 12:9.³ At the end of the fourth century, with Jews still only allowed in the city one day a year, Jerusalem became an exclusively Christian city, the only one in the country—as predicted in Mark 12:9 when the vineyard representing Jerusalem was given to *others*, representing Christians.⁴

During the thousand years between the Jewish War and the Crusades, Judea enjoyed relative peace. Then in AD 1071,⁵ one thousand years after the fall of Jerusalem and the casting of the beast into the Abyss (Dan 7:11-12, 2 Thess 2:8, Rev 19:20) in AD 70, Satan was released from the Abyss, and the Seljuk Turks took control of Judea, making travel dangerous for Christian pilgrims. This angered Europeans and, in 1096, Europe declared war on Jerusalem, and thus began the Crusades—the Battle of Gog and Magog.

Why was the Battle of Gog and Magog in AD 1096? The beast was cast into the Abyss at the death of Nero, as Nero was the last of the Caesar Dynasty. The beast then resurrects from the dead or rises out of the Abyss at the start of the Flavian Dynasty in AD 69/70. I believe the beast is Rome under its two dynasties: the Caesar and Flavian family dynasties. If the beast is Rome under the Caesar and Flavian Dynasties, then this sheds some interesting light on why the Battle of Gog and Magog began in AD 1096. The Flavian Dynasty ended in AD 96 at the death of Domitian. This means that the beast did not cease to exist until AD 96. Since the reign of the saints begins when the beast's power is taken away (Dan 7:26-27), this means that the millennium could not fully begin until AD 96. The idea that the beast is the Caesar and Flavian Dynasties, and the idea that the Battle of Gog and Magog is the first Crusade, each stand on their own merits. That they also connect in this way, being exactly 1000 years apart, is powerful evidence. In this article, we will just touch on some of the evidence in favor of the Millennium being a literal one thousand years and the Battle of Gog and Magog being the first Crusade by addressing Revelation 20 in a verse-by-verse commentary.

First, it is important to note that during the thousand years in which Satan was bound, and the saints reigned with Christ, nowhere does it say that Christians would enjoy one thousand years of uninterrupted peace. Isaiah predicts:

I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace. In righteousness you will be established: Tyranny will be far from you; and you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you (Isa 54:12-15).

The important thing to note from the above quotation is that, although God's people were promised peace, this did not mean that it would never be attacked: "If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you (Isa 54:15)." Thus, although Christians may have reigned gloriously in Judea throughout much of the thousand years between the Jewish War and the Crusades, this did not mean that they would never experience war or face occasional hardship.

Revelation 20:1-3

¹And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ²He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a

thousand years. ³He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

The fact that Satan is bound does not necessarily mean that there will be a literal heaven on earth. Satan was bound during Jesus' earthly ministry (Matt 12:29). A similar binding of Satan is found in the Book of Jubilees. In Jubilees 48:15, Satan was bound in order to allow the Hebrew slaves to escape their Egyptian pursuers. Jubilees also lists several other points in Jewish history when Satan was bound; and as a result, the people enjoyed prosperity and peace (Jubilees 23:25-30; 40:9; 46:2). The binding of Satan does not mean that the world would be free of sin. James 1:14 says, "[E]ach one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." According to this verse, it is humanity's own evil desires, not necessarily Satan's acts, that cause people to sin.

Revelation 20:4-6

⁴I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

In verse 4, John introduces the thousand-year reign. If the thousand-year reign is a literal thousand-year interval, as I believe it is, then it cannot be an end time prophecy since the events prophesied to occur at the end of the age were all expected to occur within the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries (Matt 3:12; 10:23; 16:27-28; 23:36-37; 24:34; Mark 8:38-9:1; Rev 22:7). Thus, the Thousand-Year Reign is not an end time prophecy, but rather it is the first thousand years of the new covenant, the new age predicted by Christ throughout His ministry.

The fact that the thousand-year reign is the first thousand years of the new covenant is implied by the fact that the saints were to reign with Christ at this time according to verse 4. This reign of the saints could only occur after the casting of Satan out of heaven as indicated in Revelation 12:7-11.

After the destruction of the temple in AD 70, it was impossible to follow the law of Moses. The most important event that set in motion the beginning of the thousand-year reign was the destruction of the temple in AD 70. I do not believe that the thousand-year reign was able to begin until all prophecies were fulfilled, and thus I believe that the thousand-year reign officially and finally began in AD 96 and ended exactly 1000 years later at the first Crusade in AD 1096. However, it is interesting to note that the most significant event that set in motion the start of the millennium as well as the most significant event that triggered the Battle of Gog and Magog were also each exactly one thousand years apart. The Battle of Gog and Magog was triggered by the conquest of Turkey and Palestine by the Seljuk Turks in AD 1071. This event triggered the first Crusade in AD 1096. Notice that the fall of the temple in AD 70, which was the most significant event to set in motion the start of the Millennium, and the event that triggered the first Crusade in AD 1071 were ALSO exactly 1000 years apart!

Christianity grew to become the dominant religion of Rome. Not only did Christian emperors succeed their pagan predecessors, but Christian kings also ruled Judea, a country that during the thousand years between the Jewish War and the Crusades grew to become almost exclusively Christian. This domination of the former Roman Empire, including Judea as well by Christian people, is the dominion promised the saints as predicted in verses like Revelation 5:10: *"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."* It should be noted that although Muslim kings ruled Palestine beginning in the seventh century AD, these kings profited greatly from Christian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land and, as a result, peaceably encouraged Palestine to remain Christian. Thus, in spite of Muslim rule toward the end of the thousand-year reign, Christian demographic domination of Palestine lasted exactly one thousand years until the start of the Crusades. At this time, Muslims became hostile toward Christians, and Muslim settlers gradually replaced the Christian inhabitants of the Holy Land.

The fact that Jerusalem and Palestine were ruled by Muslim emperors beginning in the seventh century AD is not evidence against this view. Remember that throughout much of Old Testament history, Israel was also ruled by foreign emperors. Israel sinned when she asked for an earthly king (1 Sam 12:19). This is because Israel's true king was never Saul, David or Nebuchadnezzar. Israel's true king was always God (Is 44:6).

The same was true during the Millennium. At the beginning of the Millennium, Palestine was ruled by pagan Roman emperors, a fact that did not change until the conversion of Constantine in AD.312. Then in AD 637, the Islamic caliphate seized control of Jerusalem. But, like old covenant Israel, new covenant Israel's true king is Jesus (Matt 21:5). This is because the Christian saints are themselves a kingdom, the

Kingdom of God. And the Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom (Luke 17:20-21) with a spiritual king, Jesus (Mt 21:5). Throughout this thousand-years interval, this spiritual kingdom of Christian saints demographically dominated Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine just as did old covenant ethnic Jews prior to AD 70, regardless of whoever their earthly king was.

I do not believe that the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven after the Millenium. I believe that the New Jerusalem is the Millenium, or at least the first thousand years of it. Thus, according to this view, the first resurrection occurs immediately after Jesus' resurrection, and the second resurrection at the Great White Throne of Judgment begins in AD 70. This judgment of the dead continues for 26 years until AD 96.

The one statement that stands in the way of this understanding is found in Revelation 20:5: "(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended)." And yet this statement is not found in the earliest manuscript of Revelation 20:5. It is also omitted in roughly half of the manuscripts dating from the fourth to the thirteenth century (ⲛ 2030 2053 2062 MajK syr^p). With this statement removed, the idea of a first and second resurrection occurring in the first century seems now to be without conflict or contradiction. (For a more-detailed discussion of the first and second resurrection, see the commentary on Revelation 20 at revelationrevolution.org.)

Revelation 20:7-9

⁷When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

In Revelation 20:9, Gog and Magog are said to "surround the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them." What is the city God loves in verse 9? This city could be Jerusalem. However, this could be any city since it is never explicitly identified (Jonah 4:11). Interestingly, verse 9 appears to have been fulfilled shockingly literally in the siege of Antioch (AD 1098) just prior to the Crusaders' siege of Muslim-occupied Jerusalem. Not long after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, Antioch grew to become a chief center of early Christianity. After the Crusaders successfully seized this former bastion of Christianity, the Seljuk Turks (Gog and Magog) surrounded the city then occupied by the Crusaders and laid siege to it. Amidst the siege, Raymond of Aguilers says that fire came down

from heaven upon the camp of the Seljuk Turks: “There appeared a fire in the sky, coming from the west, and it approached and fell upon the Turkish army, to the great astonishment of our men [the Crusaders] and of the Turks also. In the morning the Turks, who were all scared by the fire, took flight in panic.”⁶ Here we see how Gog and Magog “marched across the breath of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them” (Rev 20:9).

Revelation 20:10

¹⁰And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

When Revelation was originally written, there were no chapter breaks. Chapters were added many years later by Christian editors. However, in order to avoid a multitude of contradictions, a chapter break to start a new vision should probably be placed after Revelation 20:10 to more clearly demarcate the start of a new vision, thereby implying the fact that Revelation 20:11-15 immediately precedes Revelation 21. Placing a chapter break after Revelation 20:10 would make it more obvious to the reader that John is beginning a new vision where John back tracks to discuss in greater detail the Millennium, which was only briefly mentioned earlier. There are many times that John predicts events and then back tracks to mention the very same events again while adding additional details to expound on these events. In fact, a similar backtrack from the end to the start of the Millennium previously occurs in Revelation 20:3-4. But doesn’t the fact that verse 11 begins with “then” imply that verse 11 occurs after verse 10? Yes, but it’s only in the order in which John saw his vision, not necessarily in the order in which the events occurred. This idea is made even more likely by the fact that Revelation 20:11 does not begin with “then” or “after.” Rather, Revelation 20:11 begins with *kai*, which means “and.”

Revelation 20:11-15

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Verses 11-15 describe the Great White Throne of Judgment. This judgment scene is also predicted in Matthew 25. In Matthew 25, Jesus comes in His glory with His mighty angels at the Parousia and sits on His throne (Matt 25:31). Jesus then separates the righteous (sheep) from the wicked (goats) while sentencing the wicked “to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matt 25:46). An identical judgment scene is depicted in Revelation 20:11-15 where the wicked are also judged by God and “thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). These two judgment scenes took place in AD 70 at the climax of the Parousia.

I believe that the New Jerusalem IS the Millennium. The fact that the Great White Throne of Judgment can be shown to have begun in AD 70 is consistent with the Literal-Millennial Reign View presented above as it immediately precedes a series of detailed predictions concerning the Millennium and the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22. For more information on Literal-Millennial Reign Preterism, see revelationrevolution.org.

Above, I presented the case that the New Jerusalem appears to be the Millennium itself, which was fulfilled with the Christianization of Palestine and the rest of the Roman Empire during the thousand years between the Jewish War and the first Crusade. Thus, the general resurrection preceded the start of the Millennium. If there are any early Church writings that should be seriously considered above any others outside of the Bible itself, it should be the writings of Papias. Papias claims to have interviewed the first disciples of the Apostle John in order to gather as much information as possible that is not already present or clearly stated in the Gospels or Apostolic Letters. Citing Papias, Eusebius writes, “He [Papias] says that after the resurrection of the dead there will be a period of a thousand years, when Christ’s kingdom will be set up on earth in material form.”⁷ As stated above, Christ’s Kingdom set up in material form is the Church which did, in fact, reign over Palestine and Rome for a literal one thousand years, exactly as predicted by the disciple cited by Papias. ✝

1. Thomas A. Idinopulas, *Jerusalem Blessed, Jerusalem Cursed: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Holy City from David’s Time to Our Own* (Chicago: Ivan R. Deer, 1991), 102.
2. M. Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine: A Political History from the Bar Kokhba War to the Arab Conquest* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 16.
3. Teddy Kollek and Moshe Pearlman, *Jerusalem: A History of Forty Centuries* (New York: Random House, 1968), 140.
4. Ibid., 149.

5. Dan Bahat and Shalom Sabar, *Jerusalem, Stone and Spirit: Three Thousand Years of History and Art* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1998), 108.
6. Raymond of Aguilers, pp. 72-5; *Gesta Francorum*, pp. 57-8, 62; Fulcher of Chartes, pp. 242-6, cited in Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade (A New History): The Roots of Conflict Between Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 218-219.
7. Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 3.39.