

Systematic Theology, Lesson 38: Eschatology: The Doctrine of Last Things, Part 4

1. Review

- a. Purpose of eschatology: Eschatology is not an end in itself but should stimulate growth in Christ.
- b. Division of eschatology: Eschatology is divided into two major sections: personal eschatology and general eschatology.
 - i. Personal (or individual) eschatology
 1. Physical death
 2. Intermediate state
 - ii. General (or cosmic) eschatology
 1. Return of Christ (second advent)
 2. Millennium
 3. Rapture
 4. Resurrection and judgment
 5. Eternal punishment and new heavens and earth (eternal state)

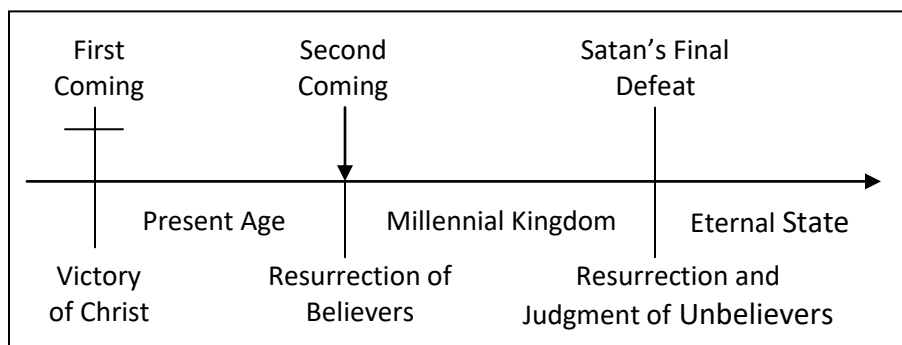
2. Millennium

- a. Where does the concept of Millennium come from?
 - i. The concept comes, primarily, from **Rev 20:1-6**: ¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ² And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³ 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. ⁴ 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.⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

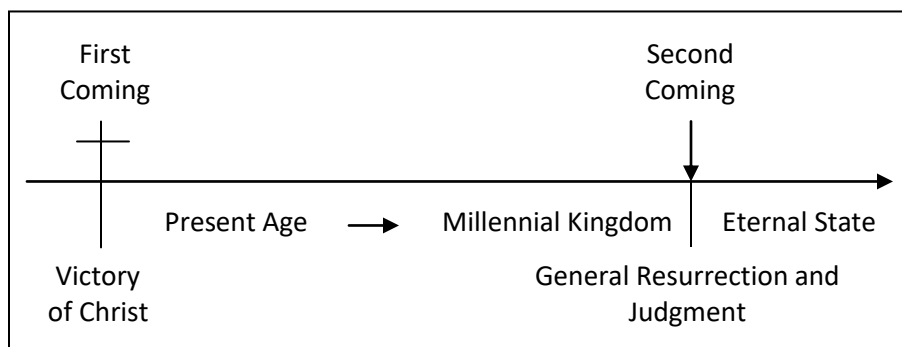
⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

- ii. Revelation 20 is the only mention of the 1,000 year reign in the Bible and thus is central to the Millennium question.
- b. What are the major positions with respect to the Millennium? There are _____ major positions with respect to the Millennium. Each position derives its name based on the relationship of the Millennium to the return of Christ.
- i. Premillennialism: Christ returns _____ the Millennium (the prefix pre- means before).



1. The present age will climax with a Great Tribulation and the return of Christ.
2. When Christ returns, he will establish an earthly kingdom and rule over it for a thousand years.
3. At the return of Christ, believers will be resurrected and reign with him, and Satan will be bound in the abyss for a thousand years.
4. At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released from the abyss and gather remaining unbelievers for battle against Christ, but they will finally be defeated.

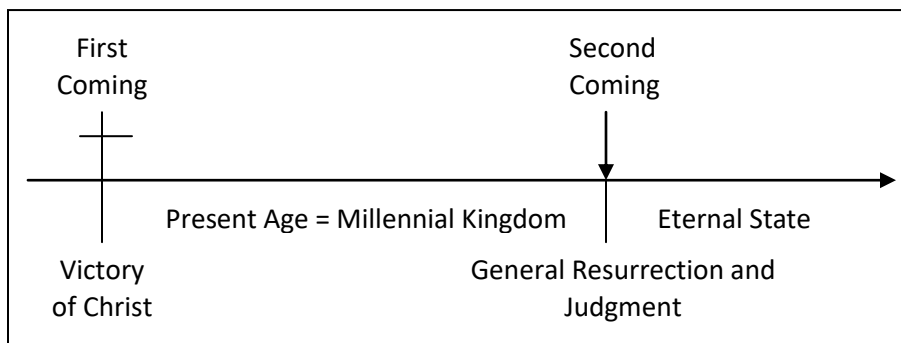
5. After this final judgment, both believers and unbelievers will enter the eternal state.
 6. Representatives:¹ John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, Charles Feinberg, John MacArthur, George Eldon Ladd, John W. Montgomery, James Boice
- ii. Postmillennialism: Christ returns _____ the Millennium (the prefix post- means after).



1. Through the proclamation of the gospel, the present age will see an increasing expansion of the kingdom of God in which many people will come to Christ.
2. The Millennium will be characterized by spiritual prosperity, peace and righteousness, and economic well-being.
3. Christ will not be physically present on the earth during the Millennial reign, but he is the primary agent and cause of the church's expansion.
4. At the end of the Millennium, there will be a brief period of apostasy and conflict between the church and the forces of evil.
5. Christ will return and a general resurrection and judgment of all mankind will follow, and believers and unbelievers will enter the eternal state.
6. Representatives: Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, Augustus H. Strong, Lorain Boettner, Douglas Wilson

¹ For teaching purposes, I have included several views of premillennialism together as one. In reality, however, there are different nuances within premillennialism. We will discuss these differences in a subsequent systematic theology lesson.

- iii. Amillennialism: There is _____ Millennium (the prefix a- means not), or more technically, the present age is the Millennium.



1. The Millennial Kingdom began at Christ's first coming and will continue until Christ's second coming.
 2. The Millennial Kingdom is a mixture of good and evil.
 3. The conflict between the church and the forces of evil will intensify until Christ's second coming.
 4. Christ will return and a general resurrection and judgment of all mankind will follow, and believers and unbelievers will enter the eternal state.
 5. Representatives: Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, Anthony Hoekema, Cornelius Venema, Meredith G. Kline, Samuel Storms, Samuel Waldron, Kim Riddlebarger
- c. What are the *key* issues? There are five basic questions that show the major differences between each position.
- i. Is the binding of Satan present or future?
 - ii. Is the "first resurrection" spiritual or physical?
 - iii. Is the duration of the thousand years symbolic or literal?
 - iv. Is the location of the millennial reign heaven or earth?
 - v. Is the chronology of **Rev 19:21-20:1** recapitulatory or sequential?
 - vi. Summary chart of the views:

Issue	Premil	Postmil	Amil
Satan's Binding	Future	Present or Future ²	Present
First Resurrection	Physical	Spiritual	Spiritual
Thousand years	Literal	Literal or Symbolic ³	Symbolic
Locale of Reign	Earth	Earth and Heaven ⁴	Heaven
Chronology of 19-20	Sequential	Sequent/Recap ⁵	Recap

d. Arguments for the key issues:⁶

i. Is the binding of Satan present or future? _____.

1. Timing of the binding. According to New Testament texts, Satan is currently bound in the current age (**Matt 12:29; Luke 10:17-18; John 12:31-32; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8b; Rev 12:9**). Yet many other text suggest that Satan is active in the current age, including deception (**Luke 22:3; John 13:27; Luke 22:31; Acts 5:3; 2 Cor 12:7; 1 Thess; 2:18; Matt 13:19; Luke 8:12; John 8:44; Acts 26:18; 1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 2 Cor 4:3-4; 2 Cor 11:3, 4; Eph 2:2; Eph 6:11-12; 2 Tim 2:26; 1 Pet 5:8; 1 John 3:8-10; 1 John 5:19; Rev 12:9; 18:23; 19:20**). Based on both sets of Scriptures, I think it is safe to say that Satan is on a leash, but it is a long leash. Thus, in one sense, Satan's binding is both now and future. But what is the nature of Satan's binding in Revelation 20?
2. Nature of the binding. Those that argue for "present" day binding say that Satan is not bound from all activity but his binding is only a limitation of extent. The problem with this is that in **Revelation 20** Satan's binding is complete inactivity on earth.
 - a. The language of unnamed angel (**v. 1**), great chain (**v. 1**), and shutting and sealing the abyss (**v. 3**), suggest a complete inactivity.

² Some postmillennialists view the binding of Satan at Christ's first advent, but others view the binding of Satan at a future point when the Millennium begins, though the exact point of binding is unknown because the exact beginning of the Millennium is unknown.

³ Because postmillennialists do not know the exact beginning of the Millennium, the thousand years could be literal. However, most postmillennialists view the thousand years as symbolic.

⁴ Postmillennialists view the Millennial reign as both in heaven and on earth but believe that Christ reigns from heaven not on earth.

⁵ Some postmillennialists see Revelation 19 and 20 as sequential, but in their view Rev 19:11-19 does not refer to Christ's second coming, so Revelation 20 does not speak of a future Millennium.

⁶ I am grateful to Matthew Waymeyer, *Revelation 20 and the Millennial Debate* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Publications, 2001, 2004) through whom many of these insights and much of the material has been adapted.

- b. In the two other instances the word “abyss” (**v. 3**) is used in **Luke 8:31** and **Revelation 9**, it entails complete removal of activity on earth.
 - c. **Revelation 20:7-8** says that Satan will be released from the abyss to deceive the nations. Why would he need to be released to deceive if the abyss was not a complete inactive binding?
 - d. Thus, the nature of the binding is complete inactivity on earth.
3. Purpose of the binding. Those that argue for “present” binding say that the purpose of Satan’s binding is only “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer” (**Rev 20:3**); that is, he is unable to stop the spread of the gospel. However, the use of the purpose clause in **Rev 20:3** does not preclude other purposes for his binding. Furthermore, the purpose clause is not concerned with the spread of the gospel to the nations but the deception of the nations.
- ii. Is the first resurrection spiritual or physical? _____.
- 1. View 1: spiritual resurrection of regeneration
 - a. Arguments for:
 - i. Throughout the New Testament regeneration is said to be a resurrection from the dead (**Mark 12:26-27; John 5:25-29; John 11:25; Rom 6:4-6; 8:10-11; Eph 2:1, 4-6; Col 2:12-13; Col 3:1; 1 John 3:14; 1 John 5:11-13**).
 - ii. The subjects of this resurrection are “souls” (**Rev 20:4**) which must mean a spiritual resurrection.
 - b. Arguments against:
 - i. The word used for “resurrection” in **Rev 20:5-6**, *anastasis*, is never used in the New Testament to refer to regeneration.

- ii. The word “to life” in **v. 4** would require a different meaning than the word “to life” in **v. 5**.
- 2. View 2: spiritual resurrection of the soul’s ascension into heaven at death.
 - a. Arguments for:
 - i. Seems to fit the context of believers being martyred and their souls going to heaven.
 - ii. The verb “to life” is used at least twice in the New Testament to refer to the existence of life without the body (**Luke 20:38; 1 Pet 4:6**).
 - b. Arguments against:
 - i. The understanding of “to life” (**v. 4**) has a reference to life without the body doesn’t fit the context.
 - ii. The word “resurrection” (**v. 5**) is never used in the New Testament to refer the soul’s transition from earth to heaven.
- 3. View 3: physical resurrection of believers
 - a. Arguments for:
 - i. The noun “resurrection” in the New Testament is almost exclusively used for physical resurrection.
 - ii. The exact same form of the word “to life” is used in both **v. 4** and **v. 5**. In **v. 5** it is a clear reference to physical resurrection (all sides agree) so it must also be the same for **v. 4**—physical resurrection.
 - iii. When the verb “to life” is used in the context of bodily death, it always refers to a bodily resurrection (cf. **John 11:25; Acts 1:3; 9:41**).
 - b. Defense of view 3:
 - i. Objection: the Bible speaks only of a single, general resurrection (**John 5:28-29; Dan 12:2; Acts 24:15**),

so why say that one passage in Revelation contradicts this teaching? Answer: the passages do not preclude the idea of two resurrections. They simply do not specify the detail of the resurrections being broken in time.

- ii. Note: There are other technical objections and adequate responses, but that is beyond the scope of this class.

iii. Is the duration of the thousand years symbolic or literal? _____.

1. Those who embrace a symbolic view of the thousand years, argue that the book of Revelation is highly symbolic. But the problem with this view is that it is overly simplistic. Because there is much in Revelation that is not symbolic, the presence of symbolism does not mean everything is symbolic.
2. Those who embrace a symbolic view of the thousand years, argue that the number one thousand is a symbolic number. But the problem with this view is that it is overly simplistic. Many of the numbers in Revelation are not symbolic. Each number must be taken on a case by case basis.
3. “One thousand years” is used two other places in Scripture (**Ps 90:4; 2 Pet 3:8**) and in both cases a literal meaning of the thousand years makes sense of the passage not a symbolic meaning.
4. The “thousand years” is used in contrast to a “short time” in **v. 3**, which, if John intended to communicate a “long time,” he would have used “long time” over against a “short time.” But he used a “thousand years” instead.
5. The “thousand years,” if symbolic, possesses neither of the characteristics of symbolic language. In order for it to be symbolic it must (a) be *absurd* if taken literally and (b) be *clarifying* if taken symbolically.
 - a. Absurd if taken literally. Example: **Isa 55:12**: the trees of the field will clap their hands. The literally meaning of these words poses a major problem—trees don’t have hands. But there is no inherent absurdity for believing in a “thousand years.”

- b. Clarifying if taken symbolically. Example: **Isa 55:12**, the literal meaning is absurd, so therefore we take this symbolically, which clarifies the meaning, namely, that Israel's return of exile would be a great rejoicing. Taking a "thousand years" symbolically doesn't clarify the point.
- iv. Is the location of the millennial reign heaven or earth? _____.
1. **Revelation 5:10 and 11:5** speak of an earthly reign.
 2. The elimination of Satan from activities on *earth* is what makes the Millennial reign possible. Why would Satan have to be bound if the Millennial reign is in heaven?
 3. **Revelation 20:9** indicates that saints in the Millennium are living "on the broad plain of the earth."
 4. Revelation teaches that Christ will come to earth (**19:11-16**) after which a thousand year reign will ensue (**20:4-6**).
- v. Is the chronology of **Rev 19:21-20:1** recapitulatory or sequential?
_____.
1. Views
 - a. Recapitulatory: The events of **Rev 20:1-6** *recapitulate* those of **19:11-21**.
 - b. Sequential: The events of **Rev 20:1-6** *follow* those of **19:11-21**.
 2. Arguments for the sequential view:
 - a. The use of "any longer" (**Rev 20:3**) suggests a chronological relationship between 19 and 20.
 - b. The description of the "lake of fire" (**Rev 20:10**) is described as the place "where the beast and the false prophet are also," which event took place in **Rev 19:20**.
 - c. The content of the visions what has been seen thus far precludes seeing **Revelation 20** preceding the events of **Revelation 19**:

- i. The binding of Satan has been shown to be a future event not a present age event.
 - ii. The resurrection at the beginning of the Millennium is a bodily one, which means the resurrection has not happened in the present age.
 - iii. The duration of the Millennium is a thousand years which places this in the future.
- e. **GCBC Statement of Faith** (“Last Things” subsection “The Second Coming and Millennial Reign”)

We teach that after the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David and establish His Messianic kingdom for a thousand years on the earth. During this time the resurrected saints will reign with Him over all the nations of the earth. This reign will be preceded by the overthrow of the Antichrist and the False Prophet, and by the removal of Satan from the world.

We teach that the kingdom itself will be the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel to restore them to the land which they forfeited through their disobedience. The result of their disobedience was that Israel was temporarily set aside but will again be awakened through repentance to enter into the land of blessing.

We teach that this time of our Lord's reign will be characterized by harmony, justice, peace, righteousness, and long life, and will be brought to an end with the release of Satan.