

The Thousand-Year Reign

Dub McClish

The vast majority of Protestants believe the “thousand years” of Revelation 20:1–7 refers to the tenure of Christ’s reign in an earthly kingdom upon His return. Since He will come **before** His alleged millennial reign, this theological system is called “premillennialism.”

Since the aforementioned passage is the Bible’s only reference to a millennial reign of Christ, premillennialists rely heavily upon it, in spite of the fact that it does not contain or support premillennial dogma. For example, the passage does not mention such essential parts of the pre-millennial program as the “rapture,” the bodily resurrection of saints, the city of Jerusalem, an earthly reign of Christ, a thousand years of earthly peace, or even the Second Coming—all essential points of the schema.

A principal key to understanding the book of Revelation is that it is largely written in symbolic or figurative “code” language (Rev. 1:1). No other Biblical document contains as many signs and symbols as this one. One should thus approach its details as symbolic unless there is some contextual reason not to do so. Note the figurative flavor of the opening verses of Revelation 20 (the “angel,” the “key,” the “great chain,” the “bottomless pit”/“abyss,” and the “seal” are all obviously figurative). There is every reason to believe (and no reason not to believe) the “thousand years” is also figurative.

The events described in Revelation 20:1–9 are not a chronological continuation of chapter 19, which describes Jesus’ return, His destruction of all the ungodly, and His casting the “beast” and the “false prophet” into Hell (vv. 11–21)—all of which are highly figurative descriptions of the end of time and the Judgment.

Revelation several times moves in cycles from the beginning of the church to the end of time, the last such cycle occurring in 20:1–9. In these verses John recaps the period from Pentecost to the Judgment (the Christian Age), during which Satan is bound for “a thousand years,” “loosed for a little time,” and at last cast into Hell forever. During this period (the present Christian Age), Christ **now** reigns over His kingdom, the church (Mat. 16:18–19; John 18: 36; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:5–6, 9; et al.), and simultaneously, Satan’s power is restrained. The “thousand years” of Satan’s “binding” and of Christ’s millennial reign is figurative, denoting a long, but indeterminate, period (cf. the “thousand hills” [Psa. 50:10] and the “thousand generations” [Deu. 7:9]). During this time, “souls” (not bodies) of martyrs “reign” with Christ in Heaven (not on the earth), awaiting the universal bodily resurrection at His coming (John 5:28–29; 1 Cor. 15:22–26). **We are living in the millennium, the figurative “thousand-year” reign of Christ.**

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