

Millennial Reign of Christ

Source: Chart by Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice - click to enlarge - Millennium on Right Side

THE MILLENNIUM

Millennium is a term derived from the Latin *mille* meaning "a thousand". The term "**Millennium**" per se is not found in the Scriptures but is used by many evangelicals to identify the period of "**one thousand years**" which John mentions six times in [Revelation 20](#). Other synonyms for "Millennium" include "Millennial Kingdom", "Messianic Kingdom", "1000 Year Reign of Christ", "Messianic Age" and "literalistic chiliasm". As outlined below, the characteristics of the "Millennium" are described in considerable detail in the Old Testament, albeit this period is never specifically defined as 1000 years in the OT text.

Related Resources:

- **Millennium 1** - overview of Rev 19:11-21:3, history of interpretation
- **Millennium 2** - events leading up to
- **Millennium 3** - description

It is interesting to read the definition of "Millennium" from Webster's dictionary...

Millennium (Mil*len"ni*um) n. [LL., fr. L. *mille* a thousand + *annus* a year] the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20 during which holiness is to prevail and Christ is to reign on earth

In simple terms there are 3 basic approaches to interpretation of "1000 years" in Revelation 20 summarized as:

- 1) Pre-millennial:** Christ will return before the 1000 years
- 2) Post-millennial:** Christ will return after the 1000 years. This view holds that the gospel will triumph over evil and not the visible second coming of Jesus Christ.
- 3) Amillennial:** No literal, visible millennium on earth. This view holds that Satan is bound and the church is experiencing the millennium now.

In fairness, it should be noted that this summary is meant to be a generalization and does not seek to go into the various arguments or permutations of belief of the post- and a-millennial views. One is referred to other websites and resources for that exercise.

It should also be stated at the outset of this website **does not** espouse a single specific theological approach to eschatology including, including even Dispensationalism which also strongly supports a literal millennium. Instead the approach is to seek to adhere as best as is humanly possible to a literal interpretation of the Biblical text. As a chemistry major at the University of Texas and later as a medical doctor trained in the practice of observation of literal tissue samples (specifically as a pathologist analyzing various tissues and cells of the human body under a microscope) I take the approach that

if the plain **sense** of the Biblical text makes good **sense** in context, then one should seek to make no other **sense** out of the inspired text for fear that the conclusion may end up as sheer **nonsense**.

And so it follows, especially if you are new to the study of prophecy, that one of the most important rules for accurate interpretation is to allow the Scripture to speak for itself, reading the text for the normal, plain sense, as long as the context allows (see discussion on Reading the Scripture Literally). Utilizing this admittedly simple and even somewhat simple minded approach, it is difficult to overlook John's declaration that there is a 1000 year period in which Jesus Christ will reign and rule on earth as Lord of lords and King of kings.

In fairness, it should be acknowledged that there are many good and godly people who disagree with the **literal interpretation** of [Revelation 20](#) which leaves the **non-literal interpretation** as their only option. By default, they must resort to allegorical, spiritual or symbolic interpretation. A non-literal interpretative approach opens one to the vulnerability of fallen man's ingenuity and imagination. In other words, how far does one control the limits of their spiritualizing? What is the plumb line that determines the accuracy of their non-literal assessment?

The inherent dangers of **non-literal interpretation** should be readily apparent. I firmly believe that the difficulty of defining when an interpretation is too allegorical, too spiritualized, too symbolic, too mystical, etc is one of the major reasons there are so many conflicting and confusing interpretations on the book of the Revelation and specifically on this short section of Scripture in [Revelation](#)

[20](#). And is it possible, that the Old Serpent, Satan, the liar, the devil, the diabolos (literally one who throws between or comes between and so one who divides!) has had no small part in orchestrating the confusion the interpretation of the Revelation of Jesus Christ which clearly defines our Lord's triumph and Satan's utter and final defeat? How often I hear Christians say they have never even read the Revelation of Jesus Christ. When I ask "Why not?", the most common answers are "I'm afraid to read it", "There are too many interpretations, so how can you know who is correct", or "It simply cannot be understood." I beg to disagree, dear Christian brother or sister. If you are born from above, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, Who lives in you as your resident Teacher, Whom Jesus said

"will teach you all things" (John 14:26) and will "guide you into all the truth...and... will disclose to you what is to come." (John 16:13)

In his first epistle, John reminds us that...

"...the anointing (which alludes to the teaching ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit) which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. (1John 2:27)

From other NT passages, we know that John is not saying you never need a teacher, but that you must understand that you as a believer already possess in the Spirit's anointing the best Teacher you will ever have and One Who will help discern whether your human teachers are speaking truth or error.

Before you go any further and are biased even more by the interpretative comments on this page, you might take a moment and lay aside all you preconceived notions, your denominational trappings, your favorite prophecy teacher's interpretation, etc, and come to [Revelation 19-22](#) as if you have never read this section before. Ask your Teacher the Holy Spirit to lead you into all the truth. Come with a heart that is tender and that trembles at His Word (Isaiah 66:5) seeking the plain sense of what God has declared about the end times. Remember that "**God is not a God of confusion**"! (1 Corinthians 14:33)

As you read these amazing passages, you might make a simple list of the major events from Revelation 19:11-21:3. You might also want to try to group the major events together and number each group. Then armed with what the Scripture clearly states, you will be better prepared to evaluate what the commentaries (including the one you are reading) have to say about these passages. As I always like to say

"It's amazing how much light the Scriptures will shed on the commentaries!"

Now ask yourself as you simply wrote down the events in [Revelation 19:11-21:3](#), does a literal reading suggest a logical sequence of the events? Again, try to put aside anything and everything you have ever been told about prophecy in general and the Revelation in particular, so that you might arrive at the most objective interpretation possible. May God's Spirit grant you His amazing grace to do so. Amen.

The Millennium

If you observe [Revelation 19:11-21:3](#) literally, independent of any teaching on prophecy you may have heard or specific theological viewpoint, you will be able to come up with a literal timeline of the end time events similar to the one below. As you look over this outline ask yourself "Does this sequence of events seem logical and orderly?" If so, why would one need to allegorize the 1000 years? Is 1000 years not compatible with God's plan for the end of time? Why not? Is it because you were taught by someone you respected who simply did not believe the 1000 years was literal? Or is it because you have read several commentaries that don't interpret "1000" as "one thousand"? Even if you did not know that there were literally dozens of Old Testament Scriptures that perfectly paralleled this period of "one thousand years", can you not see how the literal interpretation fits so well into the flow of events in these last chapters? Notice I am not espousing any particular theological viewpoint (dispensational or otherwise) but only a simple minded literal reading of the Scripture.

(1) The Second Coming of Christ:

And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." ([Revelation 19:16](#))

(2) The defeat and fate of the Antichrist and the false prophet

"And the beast (the "antichrist", cf [1John 2:18](#)) was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh." ([Revelation 19:20-21](#))

(3) The binding of Satan for 1000 years

"And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having 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 threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the **thousand years** were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time." ([Revelation 20:1-3](#))

(4) The reign of Christ and His saints for 1000 years

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the 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 upon their forehead and upon 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 resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection (these are the saints, the genuine believers, of all ages); 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**. ([Revelation 20:1-3](#))

(5) Satan's final defeat and eternal demise in the lake of fire

And when the **thousand years** are completed (notice how this time phrase indicates a sequence or an order in the events), 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. ([Revelation 20:1-3](#))

(6) The Final Judgment of all Unbelievers at the Great White Throne

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them (this appears to describe a time in eternity future when there is no heaven and no earth, old or new). And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. ([Revelation 20:1-3](#))

(7) The New Heaven and New Earth and "Immanuel" God With Us Forever

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them" ([Revelation 21:1-3](#))

A simple reading of the plain text, and listing of the events, leads to the objective conclusion that there is a period between Christ's defeat of the Antichrist and time of the Great White throne judgment which is separated by 1000 years, the period many have referred to as the "**Millennium**."

Some have claimed that belief in a literal "Millennium" is the product of twentieth century evangelical interpretation but there is ample evidence that this view was also held by the early church, one source recording that...

Many of the early fathers, including Papias (c. 60–c. 130), Justin (c. 100–c. 165), Irenaeus, Tertullian, Victorinus of Pettau (d. c. 304) and Lactantius (c. 240–c. 320), were premillennialists, i.e. they expected the personal coming of Christ in glory to inaugurate a millennial reign on earth before the last judgment. This belief was not only an interpretation of Rev. 20, but also a continuation of Jewish apocalyptic expectation of an interim messianic kingdom. The framework of Rev. 20 was filled with content derived from Jewish apocalyptic and especially from OT prophecies, with the result that the millennium was understood primarily as a restoration of paradise. Amid the abundant fruitfulness of the renewed earth and peace between the animals, the resurrected saints would enjoy 1,000 years of paradisaic life on earth before being translated to eternal life in heaven. The 1,000 years were explained either as the originally intended span of human life on earth or as the world's sabbath rest at the end of a 7,000-years' 'week' of history. It was the materialistic nature of this millennialism which made it objectionable to others of the fathers, including Augustine, whose highly influential rejection of it led to the virtual disappearance of premillennialism until the 17th century. (Ferguson, S. B., & Packer, J. *New Dictionary of Theology*. Page 428. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press)

Of the **Early Church Fathers** we read in more detail that...

"**Papias**, who had personal contact with those taught by Christ and His apostles and may well have been a disciple of the apostle John, asserted that "the Lord used to teach concerning those [end] times" that "there will be a period of a thousand years after the resurrection of the dead and the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth" (cited in Eusebius HE iii.39.12; Irenaeus Adv. haer v.33.3f).... (Papias') account is a weighty testimony to primitive Christian eschatological beliefs...**Justin Martyr**, "the most important of the Greek apologists of the second century" (Quasten, I, 196), while granting that "many who belong to the pure and pious faith and are true Christians think otherwise" than he on the millennial issue, explicitly declared: "I and others are right-minded Christians in all points and are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged" (Dial. 80f; cf. J. Daniélou, VC, 2 [1948], 1–16).... In taking a millennial viewpoint, these fathers ranged themselves on the side of orthodoxy in two particulars: they supported the apostolicity and canonicity of Revelation (against those who combined a denial of its authenticity with amillennialism, e.g., Dionysius of Alexandria, as cited in Eusebius HE vii.14.1–3; 24.6–8); and they opposed both the Gnostics, whose dualistic spiritualizing of Christian doctrine completely wiped out eschatological hope, and Christian Platonists such as **Origen** (De prin. ii.11.2), whose rejection of a literal millennium stemmed from an idealistic depreciation of matter and a highly dangerous **allegorical** (**Ed note:** Figurative, symbolic and specifically having deeper or hidden spiritual meaning that transcends the literal sense of a sacred text! It is a method of interpreting a text in which the characters, events or places signify "deeper" meanings than their literal meaning. The allegorical method was especially employed with difficult texts. Even opponents of a literal millennial interpretation can clearly discern the potential pitfalls and dangers of the allegorical approach to the Word of Truth.) **hermeneutic** (**Ed note:** hermeneutics is the "science" or study of the methodological principles of interpretation, in this case of the Scripture)". (A. C. McGiffert, *History of Christian Thought*, I [1932], 227f)." (Bromiley, G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised. Vol. 3, Page 357-358. Wm. B. Eerdmans) (Bolding added)

If the early church believed in the Millennium, what happened to relegate this view to obscurity for most of the "Middle Ages"? The answer is probably far more complex, but the short answer is based upon fact that the influential theologian Augustine interpreted who initially interpreted "1000 years" literally. Augustine however later recanted being driven away from that position by the "immoderate, carnal" extremism of some of its advocates (Civ. Dei xx.7), and began to interpret the "1000 years" as not an actual length of time but as a "symbol", which in turn led to the pontification of the teaching that there was no literal 1000 year reign of Christ upon earth, a doctrine usually referred to as "**Amillennialism**". More specifically, Augustine began to follow the symbolical-mystical hermeneutic approach of the fourth-century donatist Tyconius (a schismatic heretical Christian sect originating in N Africa in 311 AD, that maintained that it alone constituted the true church and arose out of the initial teaching of Donatus who sought to separate the "pure" church from the "apostate," or "fallen," church) in arguing that

the "1000 years" of [Revelation 20](#) actually designated the interval "from the first coming of Christ to the end of the world, when He shall come the second time" (xx.8). Thus was "a new era in prophetic interpretation" introduced, wherein Augustine's conception of the millennium as "spiritualized into a present politico-religious fact, fastens itself upon the church for about thirteen long centuries" (Froom, I, 479, with tabular summary of medieval views, 896f; see also R. C. Petry, *Christian Eschatology and Social Thought: A Historical Essay on the Social Implications of Some Selected Aspects in Christian Eschatology to a.d. 1500* [1956], pp. 312–336). (ibid)

The Protestant Reformation brought about a renewed interest in the idea of "Sola Scriptura" (the Scriptures alone) but did not completely reverse Augustine's symbolic/mystical approach to interpretation of Revelation 20. It seems that most of the Reformers...

"were so (legitimately) preoccupied with correcting the Church's soteriological (doctrines dealing with how a person is genuinely saved or born again) errors that they could not give high priority to eschatology (study of future events). But from the pre-Reformers Wycliff and Huss to Luther, Calvin, and the doctrinal affirmations of Protestant Orthodoxy, the papacy was identified with the antichrist. This conviction led many Reformation Protestants to believe that the end of the world was at hand (T. F. Torrance, SJT, Occasional Papers 2, pp. 36–62; Vulliaud, pp. 127f). Had it not been for the outbreak of chiliasm (believe in a literal 1000 years) in a particularly offensive form at Münster (1534), early Church teaching on the millennium might have been recovered along with other doctrines obscured in the medieval synthesis. The speculations of radicals, however, as concretized in Münzer's "Zion," were so offensive to all that this was rendered impossible. The Augsburg Confession, art 17 (Lutheran) and the Helvetic Confession, art 11 (Reformed) expressly rejected such "Jewish opinions" (but, let it be noted, **did not reject millennialism per se** — cf. Peters, Theocratic Kingdom, I, 531–34; M. Reu, Lutheran Dogmatics [1951], pp. 483–87; and Saarnivaara, pp. 94f)." (ibid) (Bolding added)

It is interesting that many of the Reformers interpreted the millennium to be a period of 1,000 years, but that this 1000 years was variously dated as in the past time, during which the gospel flourished. They interpreted the release of Satan from bondage after 1000 years as coinciding with the rise of the medieval papacy (as alluded to the previous quote). Not all early Protestants agreed with the predominant view of the Reformers as shown by the return to a literal interpretation of Revelation 20 in the early 17th century, especially under the influence of Joseph Mede (1586-1638). By the 1800's under the influence of J N Darby (1800-1882), founder of the Plymouth Brethren movement, there was a rising interest in interpretation of the "1000 years" as a literal "1000 years". The upshot is that for the past 2000 years there have always been genuine believers who espoused a literal interpretation of [Revelation 20](#). so that this approach is not a "product" of modern day evangelicals, especially those who hold to a dispensational approach to theology. (See also article on [The Millennial Position of Spurgeon by Dennis Swanson](#))

Finally, let us conclude these background comments on the "1000 years" by quoting an honest, albeit liberal amillennialist, S. D. F. Salmond (in "Christian Doctrine of Immortality" 2nd ed 1896) who admits that...

"The figurative interpretation, it must be owned, cannot be made exegetically good even in its most plausible applications... This remarkable paragraph in John's Apocalypse speaks of a real millennial reign of Christ on earth together with certain of His saints, which comes in between a first resurrection and the final judgment" (pp. 441f).(ibid, p360)

Does the Old Testament support the idea of a literal 1000 year reign of Christ on the earth? There is no specific statement defining a 1000 year period of time in the OT. There are however many passages that describe a period associated with the return of Christ in which there are unique physical, spiritual and political characteristics which are very compatible with the one thousand year reign of Christ on the earth. As the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states

"it is almost universally admitted, by both opponents and advocates of millennialism, that the case for the doctrine rests squarely on the exegesis of [Revelation 20](#). (ibid)