

How Long?

The Jewish Hope Behind Revelation 20

A Thousand Years: The Millennium, the Last Day, and the Christian Hope

Week One of Five

Revelation 20:1–10 (ESV)

All Saints Sunday, November 1, 2026

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hear the Word of the Lord from Revelation chapter 20, beginning with the first verse.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. 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 ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:1–10

This is the Word of the Lord.

HOW LONG?

How long? That is one of the oldest questions in the Bible. How long until this changes? How long until suffering ends? How long until God acts? How long until evil is judged? How long until death itself is defeated?

We know that question. We ask it in hospital rooms and beside graves. We ask it when wars drag on, when cruelty seems to prosper, when a diagnosis changes everything, when the world feels as though it is coming loose at the seams. **How long?**

And then we come to Revelation 20 and hear an answer that is not immediately simple: **A thousand years.** Satan is bound for a thousand years. The saints live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. Then the thousand years end. What are those years? Are they happening now, or are they still ahead of us? Does Jesus return before them, or after them?

Prophecy teaching can become complicated very quickly. Charts. Timelines. Books. Conferences. People pointing to headlines and saying, “This is it. The clock is ticking.”

So over these five weeks we are going to slow down and begin with Scripture. Today we start with the simplest question:

What is the millennium? The word simply means “one thousand years.” The harder question is what John means by it. To understand that, we need to understand the world of hope behind Revelation.

THE CURTAIN PULLED BACK

Revelation belongs to a kind of biblical writing we call apocalyptic. The basic idea is simple. Apocalyptic pulls back the curtain. It shows earthly events from heaven’s point of view. John did not invent that language. He inherited it from the Old Testament, especially Daniel and Ezekiel.

Daniel sees terrifying beasts rising from the sea. They represent kingdoms and empires. Kings boast. God’s people suffer. Yet above them all sits the Ancient of Days. The beasts rage. But they do not own history. God does.

Daniel also sees one like a Son of Man receiving an everlasting kingdom. Jesus deliberately takes that language upon Himself.

FORGED UNDER OCCUPATION

But Jewish apocalyptic hope did not grow in an armchair. **It was forged in suffering.** A major moment came in the second century before Christ during the Maccabean crisis. Under

Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Jewish worship was attacked, the Temple was desecrated, and faithful Jews were persecuted. The Maccabees revolted to reclaim the Temple and restore worship. And the old question became urgent: How long will pagan empires rule? How long will faithful people suffer? How long before God acts?

Jewish apocalyptic hope was shaped under occupation, persecution, desecration, and failed revolutions. The Scriptures gave language to that hope. Daniel speaks of kingdoms and judgment. Ezekiel sees dry bones live again and speaks of Gog and Magog gathering against God's people, only to be destroyed by God Himself. Isaiah looks forward to the day when God will swallow up death forever and wipe away tears.

And in the centuries before Jesus, many Jews spoke of two ages: this present age of sin and suffering, and the age to come, when God would judge evil, raise the dead, and establish His righteous rule.

There was no single Jewish end times chart. Expectations differed. Messiah. Resurrection. Israel's restoration. Tribulation before deliverance. Sometimes even a distinct messianic period before the final consummation. But beneath those differences was one great hope:

God will act. God will judge. God will save. God will establish His kingdom.

Then Jesus appears in Galilee announcing: "The kingdom of God is at hand." And decades later John receives Revelation. So when John speaks of Satan bound, saints reigning, Gog and Magog gathering, the dead raised, and evil finally destroyed, his first readers do not hear those things in a vacuum. They hear ancient hopes gathered around one astonishing claim:

The decisive King has already come. Jesus Christ has already died. Jesus Christ has already risen. The age to come has already broken into this present age.

WHO REIGNS?

Now we can begin asking where the thousand years fit. Christians have generally answered in three broad ways.

Premillennialism says Christ returns before the millennium. **Postmillennialism** expects a long season of Gospel blessing before Christ returns. **Amillennialism** understands the thousand years symbolically as Christ's present reign between His first coming and His return.

We are going to take those views one at a time in the weeks ahead. Today, though, I want you to notice the deeper question underneath all three.

Who reigns? That was not obvious to the Christians who first heard Revelation. Rome looked powerful. The emperor looked powerful. Christians could be persecuted, imprisoned, and

killed. And yet the Church proclaimed: **Jesus Christ reigns.** Really? Because Caesar seems to be doing rather well. Jesus has conquered. Really? Because Christians are still dying. Satan has been defeated. Really? Because evil seems to be everywhere. Those questions do not sound so ancient. If Christ reigns, why is there war? Why cruelty? Why suffering? Why does evil sometimes prosper? Why do Christians still die? **How long?**

THE CHART IN OUR HANDS

And when that question frightens us, we become vulnerable to anyone who promises certainty.

Give me the chart. Give me the timeline. Tell me which nation fulfills which prophecy. Tell me where we are on the prophetic clock. Because if I can figure out the future, maybe I can feel safe.

And there is the Law in this text. We want control because we are afraid. Afraid of chaos. Afraid of suffering. Afraid of loss. Afraid of death. And, if we are honest, afraid of judgment.

So we take a book given to reveal Jesus Christ and turn it into a puzzle about ourselves. Have I interpreted the symbols correctly? Have I identified the signs? Do I know the sequence? Can I figure it out?

But perhaps the question beneath “How long?” is not finally: Can I figure it out? Perhaps the deeper question is: **Who can I trust while I wait?** Not how strongly I believe, as though the strength of my own faith could hold my future. The question is who is trustworthy enough to hold it.

Who has defeated death? Who has carried my sin? Who has faced judgment in my place? Who has entered the grave and come out alive? **There is only One: Jesus Christ.**

THE LAMB WHO STANDS

That is the Gospel at the center of Revelation. The Lamb was slain. And the Lamb stands.

Jesus died. And Jesus lives. He rose from the grave, He ascended into heaven, and He sits at the right hand of the Father. The devil accuses, but Christ has answered with His blood. Death threatens, but Jesus has gone through death and emerged alive. The world rages, but Christ reigns.

History is not moving randomly toward chaos. History is moving toward Jesus Christ. Revelation does not promise that everything between here and there will be easy. It promises something better. Suffering does not mean Christ has lost. Persecution does not mean Christ has lost. Even death does not mean Christ has lost.

Look at the people John sees reigning with Christ. They are martyrs. By the world's reckoning, they lost. Their enemies killed them. Yet John is permitted to see what the world cannot see. They are alive. They reign with Christ.

And on this All Saints Sunday, that matters. The saints we remember today are not lost. They are not forgotten. They are not merely memories preserved in photographs and stories. They belong to Christ. And because Christ lives, they live. The same Christ who holds the witnesses John saw holds your own dead in Christ, and He holds you. And at His Table, where He gives you His true body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins, you are gathered with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, with every saint we remember today.

What looks like defeat from earth looks very different from heaven. That is why Revelation was written. It pulls back the curtain. Christ reigns. The devil is not sovereign. The saints are not forgotten. Death is not the final word.

A DRAGON ON A CHAIN

And notice something else. Satan is not God's equal. John does not see God struggling against some almost equal enemy. An angel comes down with a chain and binds the dragon.

An angel. The great dragon who terrifies the earth remains a creature. His power has limits. His time has limits. **His defeat is certain.** And when Gog and Magog gather at the end, the final battle is almost startlingly short. They gather. They surround the saints. It looks terrifying. And then it is over. **God ends it.** The point is not that evil is harmless. The point is that evil is not sovereign. **God is.**

THE ONE WHO COMES NEXT

So perhaps the first lesson of the millennium is not about the number one thousand. Perhaps the first lesson is about Jesus.

Before asking exactly when Christ reigns, hear the proclamation: **Christ reigns.** Before asking precisely how Satan is bound, hear the proclamation: **Satan does not reign.** Before asking where we stand on the prophetic timetable, hear the promise: Those who belong to Christ belong to Him even through death. And before asking whether you can understand every detail of the future, ask the better question: **Who can you trust?**

You can trust the One who loved you enough to die for you. You can trust the One whom death could not hold. You can trust the One who says: **“I am the resurrection and the life.”** And you can trust the One who has promised: **“I will come again.”**

That is where this series begins. Not with fear. Not with speculation. Not with a chart. **With Christ.**

Over the next several weeks we will examine the different ways Christians have understood Revelation 20, and we will look carefully at Scripture. Next week we begin with the first major interpretation of Revelation 20 and ask: Does Christ return before the millennium?

But through all of it, hold on to this: Christian hope is not that we know everything that happens next. Christian hope is that we know the One who comes next.

Jesus Christ has died. Jesus Christ is risen. Jesus Christ reigns. And Jesus Christ will come again.

So when the old question rises again: How long? We may not be given every detail. But we are given Christ. And Christ is enough.

Amen.

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