Introduction: The thousand year reign of Christ - or what some people call the Millennium, is one of the most discussed and debated topics in the religious world today. In fact, as you talk with some of your friends or neighbors about the Bible, they might believe the Millennium is near because they view the vaccine as “the mark of the beast,” or they see current events in our country, or the actions of the UN, or the pandemic and believe these are signs that Jesus will return soon based on their understanding of Matthew 24. Maybe you haven’t heard much of this, or maybe you have. Some of you might have received \*this\* flyer in the mail… So what is the truth about the Millennium?

First, it is important to note, all the Bible has to say about this time period is limited to these few verses in Revelation 20:1-6. Richard Oster made the point in his Revelation commentary that there is no exegetical or doctrinal justification for elevating the significance of these six verses to the status they have achieved - this is far beyond John or the first audience imagined. Why is it so important to people? Because they view it beginning when Christ returns.

Now, the main doctrine we want to discuss is pre-millennialism - that is before the 1000 year reign. There are various viewpoints on this, that for the sake of this lesson, we won’t go into. But while the details vary widely, they believe that when Christ returns he will establish his kingdom in Jerusalem and will reign from there for 1000 years. This was especially popular with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Some believed that the Bible promised the restoration of the Jews to the land of Palestine, as well as the repossession of sacred sites, rebuilding the temple, restoration of things like sacrifices and worship that were stopped in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

1. The binding of Satan
   1. The text begins with an angel coming down with a key to the bottomless pit and a great chain to bind the dragon - which is explicitly identified as Satan. As a result he is thrown into the pit, shut up and sealed until the thousand years are over.
   2. In order to understand this section, we need a little bit more context.
      1. In the verses just before this, we have what is described in 16:16 as a gathering at Armageddon and the battle that took place there. This is where Jesus comes and destroys his enemies - the beast and false prophet, as well as all those who received the mark of the beast and worshipped the beast’s image.
      2. Now the text shows that two were thrown alive into the lake of first - that is the beast and the false prophet. While the rest were slain by the sword that came from Jesus’ mouth.
      3. Now, the details regarding Jesus here are very important. He is pictured in heavenly splendor, but particularly that his robe is already dipped in blood - before the battle. Further, his name is the Word of God and the way that he strikes down the nations is with the sword that comes from his mouth (v 15, 21)
      4. Many take this to be the battle at the end of time, but notice that is not what is being described. This is the victory of Jesus over Rome through his word - his judgments are pronounced, and the christians overcome by holding to His word.
      5. The text then in Revelation 20 is showing what is going to happen to Satan in the meantime (“1000” years) AFTER the destruction of Rome and its emperor worship
   3. Now this specific symbol is identified for us “*so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended.*” That’s what the binding of Satan means. When did this happen? How was it accomplished?
      1. We need to remember the Bible story to understand this part. Remember at the tower of Babylon, all the nations were deceived by Satan. Yet God chose one family through which to bring about his redemption for the world.
      2. Through the process of time, eventually God created the nation of Israel and brought them out as a sign to the nations. But as it relates to wide scale knowledge of God, it remained limited despite the existence of the nation of Israel.
      3. However, that changed when Jesus came on the scene. He comes preaching that the kingdom of God is at hand and two of the figures he uses to explain his mission are here in Luke 10 and 11.
      4. In Luke 10 Jesus sends out the 70 or 72 with the message “the kingdom of God has come near you.” When they return in 10:17-20 we have this conversation. They realizes they demons were subject to them in His name. Jesus saw Satan falling like lightning. Jesus has authority over these beings. Jesus is defeating Satan’s rule
      5. In Luke 11:14-23 Jesus explains what is happening while casting out a demon. He is in the process of binding the strong man and plundering his goods. The casting out of demons was a sign that the kingdom of God has come upon you.
      6. Then we have the ultimate coming of the kingdom at Jesus’ death - even the thief on the cross realizes this “remember me when you come in your kingdom.” The cross then becomes that moment when Jesus has completely conquered Satan.
      7. Then the logical conclusion is for the message to go to the nations - which is what Luke ends with (Luke 24:44-49) and begins and ends Acts with (Acts 1:3, 6, 28:31).
   4. See, this is what the binding is identified as - the nations are not deceived any longer. Acts 2 then becomes the beginning of the reversal of Babylon. The means by which Jesus brings his kingdom into this world and Satan cannot stop that. He tried his best by raising up the beast and false prophet in order to try to stomp out the early church, but he has failed and been bound as a result.
   5. So this is a symbolic telling of what was accomplished by the church remaining faithful to their testimony even to death, and how Rome fell to the kingdom of Christ.
2. The reign of the Saints
   1. The next image is perhaps the more well known of the 1000 year references - it is the reign. Just like we said, this is a vision connected to the victory of the saints over Satan and they are here now seen as beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and the word of God and because they did not give allegiance to the beast.
   2. The text says that they came to life and reigned with Christ for 1000 years, while the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection and there is a blessing put on them - the second death cannot hurt them. They are priests and reign with Him for 1000 years.
   3. Now, what is being described here?
      1. Who is reigning? notice that this is NOT Christ reigning for 1000 years. The subject here is of the martyrs from chapter 6 reigning for 1000 years WITH Christ.
      2. Where are they reigning from? John is seeing thrones - they are plural - the elders sat on 24 of them as well. 47 times throne is used in the book. Almost always it is clearly in heaven, although 3 are located in the New heaven and new earth. Three other uses refer to Satan or the beast’s throne which is not on earth per se, but in a spiritual dimension 2:13, 13:2, 16:10
      3. Where do these thrones come from?
         1. Daniel chapter 7 tells of the son of man coming at sitting down at the right hand of the ancient of days. But notice some other details. In verse 9 thrones were set up - multiple thrones - like what we saw in Revelation 4. Also, there is a judgment pronounced on the beast and he is destroyed.
         2. But in the explanation, Daniel is told that it is the saints of the Most High who receive and possess the kingdom and that even though the horn made war with the saints, he is defeated.
         3. The way John explains this is that it is not just Jesus who sits on the throne. But those who conquer are able to sit on his throne with him in victory. (Rev 3:21)
      4. Where does the concept of a thousand years come from?
         1. First, just like many of the numbers in Revelation, they are symbolic 3.5 years, 42 months, 144,000. 1000 is 10x10x10. But this one is used to show the length of their rule - 1000 years compared to the reign of the beast.
         2. Second, 1000 years is often used figuratively throughout the old testament. 1000 is used in temporal and non temporal figurative terms in the Bible - Deut 1:10-11 - multiply by, Deut 7:9 - generations, Psalm 84:10 - days in and out
         3. But, I believe the answer is even simpler than this. Look at 2 Peter 3:8-13. These are the same figures from Revelation 20-21 - there is a judgment of fire (20:9-10), a revealing of works (12-13), then a new heaven and new earth (21:1)
         4. Peter uses the same figure of 1000 years here as well to explain the time that Jesus waits till his return. But what might not be obvious is that this is a quotation from Psalm 90:4
         5. In Psalm 90, God is pictured as being eternal while mankind is temporary. God brings a wrathful judgment on human sin. Our days are compared as nothing to his - 70 or 80 years - So we need to number our days (90:12).
         6. But look at verse 13 - what are these righteous people wanting? They want God to return and they are asking - how long? They want him to return and reward him for their faithfulness to him.
         7. This is the same question from (6:10-11), with the same answer - Jesus returns and brings the eternal joys and pleasures that he promised.
         8. Do we see now why John (and Peter) would give these images and explanations as a means of hope? It’s old testament imagery that becomes true for the ones who remain faithful against the beast.
      5. What is the first resurrection?
         1. Clearly the Bible teaches a resurrection of all people - we’ll discuss that more in a minute. But the resurrection here seems to be about the vindication of their cause the the life they enjoy with Christ - that’s why he uses the strange “first”
         2. This is in contrast with the “second” death which obviously is not speaking of a natural death. The inclusion of a number highlights the extraordinary differences
         3. Further, it seems that this is an echo of (Ezekiel 37:10) where Israel is pictured as being resurrected as a nation. That then would be primary meaning.
         4. Notice again, this is NOT on earth. It is in heaven. And the concept of “the rest of the dead” shows this is not the final day, but referring to a different idea.
   4. In summary, one of the major flaws in the pre-millennial view is misunderstanding of Daniel 7 regarding the establishment of the kingdom and it’s fulfillment in Christ’s day.
      1. Jesus affirmed this would happen in the lives of the people he spoke to - (Mark 9:1) and that it would come with power. The power came on the disciples at Pentecost - (Acts 1:8, 2:1-4)
      2. The son of man does not receive the kingdom when he comes to the earth. He receives it when he comes to heaven. And the one time enthronement of Christ is affirmed in many places - Acts 2:33-36, (Eph 1:18-22, 4:7-10, Phil 2:5-11, Revelation 12:4b-5, Psalm 110)
      3. The Bible affirms over and over that the saints have already possessed the kingdom - Colossians 1:13, John Rev 1:9 - in the kingdom, 1:5-6, 5:9-10.
      4. The kingdom has been established and we are waiting until Christ returns and puts all enemies under his feet - Acts 2:34-35
3. The release of Satan and final judgment
   1. There are two other flaws that are present in the premillennial viewpoint
      1. First, many of the major things they say will happen as part of the millennium are not in the passage.
      2. For example, the general teaching is about fulfilling promises to Israel regarding the nation, exaltation of them over other nations, and the restoration of the land. As one man said in critiquing dispensational premillennialism, “If this is the purpose of the millennium, is it not passing strange that Revelation 20:4-6 says not a word about the Jews, the nation of Israel, the land of Palestine, or Jerusalem?”
      3. And second, the things they anticipate are part of the final state, not from the time of the millennium. For example, there is teaching that the millennium is a time when the Adamic curse is rolled back, the world is healed of its wounds like deserts, physical illnesses are healed, etc.
      4. But almost always these are not pulled from the Millennium section in 20:4-6, but from the sections on the New Heavens and New earth in Revelation 21-22 and Isaiah 65-66.
   2. So what I want us to do is walk through just what John is saying will happen at the end and compare that to other biblical teaching in the new testament
      1. First, in 20:7 he says that Satan will be released from his prison for a short time - for what purpose? To deceive the nations and gather them to surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city. This is a temporary worsening of the world much like the days of Noah that makes judgment inevitable and just.
      2. At this moment, Jesus returns. The army is completely destroyed and the Devil is throne into hell. Where he is punished forever and ever.
      3. At the same time, the earth and sky flee away and are destroyed. Then all the dead stand before the throne and are judged according to their works and if their names are in the book of life. If they are not there, they are cast into the lake of fire
      4. Then there is new creation - a new heaven and a new earth. The heavenly city of Jerusalem comes down from heaven, God dwells with man again, all the former manner of suffering is removed forever.
      5. All of this is happens in one day or at one time. It is not delayed by 1000 years as described above. The question is, what does the rest of the Bible say about this?
   3. Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 15:24-26
      1. Here Paul says in 20-26 that Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep - he is the first to be resurrected and never die again. Then he comes and brings those who belong to Christ with him
      2. Then in verse 24 it is THE END - he gives the kingdom to God and all enemies are destroyed. The last enemy destroyed is death. Jesus is reigning until the day death is defeated - just like in Revelation.
      3. Here then is a fatal flaw for the pre-millennial position. They have 1000 years of life and death after the coming of Christ. Yet he shows that death is defeated at the coming of Christ.
   4. Peter’s teaching in Acts 3:21 and 2 Peter 3
      1. In Acts 3 Peter is discussing the same concepts and he says that Christ is in heaven now and that heaven must receive him until he time for restoring ALL things. Not some of them.
      2. Further, those who have not listened to Jesus will be destroyed from the people. That’s the exact same thing in Revelation. Yet notice again, the premillennial position has death and decay after his coming - instead of all things restored.
      3. Peter himself elaborates on this in his discussion of 2nd Peter. The present world is reserved for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly (v 7), the world is going to be destroyed and works laid bare. The righteous will inherit the new heavens and the new earth (3:13)
   5. Jesus’ own teaching in John
      1. Jesus says in John 5:27-29 that an hour is coming - that’s a specific moment. Everyone will be raised. Some for resurrection of life and others for resurrection of judgment depending on what they have done
      2. Further, Jesus taught there will be a last day - (John 6:39, 40, 44, 12:48), all mention THE last day - the premillennial idea will not work because it has 1000 years of days after the last day. Just like Paul said, it is THE END.
      3. One more passage along these lines is (Matthew 25:31-46). All of the eternal rewards and punishments are dealt out at the same time. The righteous receive the kingdom and eternal life, the wicked go away into eternal punishment.
   6. See this is one of the most dangerous parts of the premillennial idea. It is that there will be a second chance for the Jews and others to accept Christ AFTER he comes. That is simply not the case. Now is the time to get the message out about the gospel before the ultimate end and eternal judgment - now is the time to repent and prepare!
4. What does this mean for us?
   1. We are in the time of triumph where we participate in bringing the message to the world - how we fight and conquer is through holding to the testimony of Jesus, the word of God, and for not clinging to the idols and evil powers of this world (20:4). We can go forth and share the gospel as conquerers in an upside down world.
   2. Further, these people are on thrones - they are judging those who are evil and caved into the power of the beasts. Make no mistake, that in the same way, they will be our judges if we do the same - not in verdict, but by their example.
   3. There is also a blessing and word of encouragement to the readers. We can be like them and be priests of God and Christ and reign with Him - it starts now when we accept the gospel. We sit with Christ in the heavenly places.
   4. There is going to be an ultimate day when God will make all things new, he will right all wrongs, and bring judgment - he wants us to be saved before that. The way we do that is by being on the Lord’s side - by his blood - Revelation 12:11. That is a word of great encouragement, but also serious warning. Will we be like them?