

Introduction

Last week heaven stood open.

A rider appeared on a white horse. His eyes were like blazing fire. His robe was dipped in blood. And everything that had lined up against God and His people — the beast, the false prophet, the kings of the earth and their armies — met Him. It lasted two sentences. The beast was captured. The false prophet was captured. The armies were destroyed by a word from the rider's mouth. And the birds feasted.

The war is over. The beast is gone. The false prophet is gone. The rider on the white horse, whose name is Faithful and True, whose title is King of kings and Lord of lords, has won.

But the story is not finished.

There is still one enemy left. The dragon. The ancient serpent. The one who stood behind the beast and the false prophet and every system of evil that has ever set itself against God and His people. He has not been dealt with yet.

And there is something else still waiting. Something the saints have been promised since the beginning. A reign. A rest. A time when the people who endured, who refused the mark, who paid the price for their faithfulness, finally get to be with their King.

That is what chapter 20 is about.

Not just a theological debate about timelines. Not just a category to file away in your eschatology notes. This is the chapter where the saints finally come home. Where the ones who suffered get to reign. Where the King who won the war sits down with His people and the long waiting is over.

We are going to take this chapter in three parts over three weeks. Today we are in verses 1 through 6. The binding of Satan. The millennium. The first resurrection. And the reign of the saints with their King.

Read the Text: Revelation 20:1–6 (BSB)

Revelation 20:1–6 BSB

¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven with the key to the Abyss, holding in his hand a great chain.

² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

³ And he threw him into the Abyss, shut it, and sealed it over him, so that he could not deceive the nations until the thousand years were complete. After that, he must be released for a brief period of time.

⁴ Then I saw the thrones, and those seated on them had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their 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 hands. And they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

⁵ The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years were complete. This is the first resurrection.

⁶ Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Walking Through the Text

1. The Angel and the Chain (vv. 1–2a)

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. — Revelation 20:1–2a (BSB)

The scene opens with an angel descending from heaven. John does not tell us which angel this is. He does not name him or describe him in detail. The focus is not on the angel. The focus is on what the angel is carrying.

A key. And a great chain.

The key to the Abyss appeared earlier in Revelation. In chapter 9, a star falling from heaven was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When the shaft was opened, smoke poured out and locusts came up from it. That opening was an act of judgment unleashed on the earth. This scene is the reverse. The key is being used to lock something away.

The Abyss in Jewish thought was not simply a grave or a place of death. It was a place of imprisonment for rebellious spiritual powers. This is the same language used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, for the deep and formless void of Genesis 1:2. It is the realm of chaos and darkness that God rules over and restrains. Sending Satan there is not just punishment. It is containment. It is God saying: not yet. Not anymore. Not here.

And the chain is great. The word matters. This is not a symbolic restraint. In the framework John is painting, it is a real and complete binding. He is prevented from deceiving the nations as he has throughout history. What has he always done? Verse 3 tells us: deceiving the nations.

That is Satan's defining work throughout Scripture. He deceived Eve in the garden. He deceived the nations into idolatry. He deceived the kings of the earth into following the beast. Deception is not one of his tools. It is his primary weapon. And for the duration of the millennium, it is taken from him entirely.

This is worth pausing on. The binding of Satan is not described as his final destruction. That comes later. This is a strategic restraint with a purpose. The nations need to be free from his deception so that the reign of Christ and His saints can be fully realized without satanic interference.

The Old Testament background here is significant. Isaiah 24:21-22 says:

"In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and punished after many days." — Isaiah 24:21-22 (BSB)

Isaiah saw this coming. A day when the rebellious spiritual powers would be locked away. Revelation 20 is that day arriving.

2. Identifying the Dragon (v. 2b)

...that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan... — [Revelation 20:2b](#) (BSB)

John gives Satan four names in one sentence. The dragon. The ancient serpent. The devil. Satan.

This is not accidental. John is being precise. He wants his readers to know exactly who is being bound. There is no ambiguity here.

The dragon is the image used throughout Revelation, drawn from Old Testament imagery of Leviathan, the chaos monster that represents the forces of evil opposed to God. [Psalm 74:13–14](#) describes God crushing the heads of Leviathan. [Isaiah 27:1](#) promises that the LORD will punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent, the twisting serpent, and slay the dragon that is in the sea. John's readers would have recognized the dragon as the ultimate enemy of God and His people.

The ancient serpent reaches back to [Genesis 3](#). This is the same deceiver who spoke to Eve in the garden. The same voice that introduced doubt about the goodness of God and the truthfulness of His word. Everything that has gone wrong in human history traces back to that conversation. And the one who started it is now being bound.

The devil and Satan round out the identification. The word devil means accuser or slanderer. Satan in Hebrew means adversary. This is the one who stands against God's people, who accuses them before the throne, who slanders the character of God to draw people away from Him. [Job 1](#) and [Zechariah 3:1](#) both show Satan in the role of accuser. That role is now being silenced.

Four names. One enemy. And he is in chains.

For the churches of Asia Minor who first received this letter, this moment would have landed with tremendous force. The dragon was the power behind Rome. The power behind the imperial cult. The power behind the trade guilds that pressured believers to compromise. The power behind the false teachers and the persecution and the blood of the martyrs. And now he is in chains, locked in the Abyss, with a seal over the door.

He will not be deceiving anyone for a very long time.

3. The Thousand Years (vv. 2c–3)

...and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be released for a short time. — Revelation 20:2c–3 (BSB)

Here is where the passage becomes one of the most discussed texts in all of Scripture. The thousand years. The millennium. Three views have shaped the church's reading of this text across history, and it is worth knowing them before we plant our flag in one of them.

The Three Views

The **premillennial** view holds that Christ returns physically to earth before the thousand years begin. The millennium is a literal future reign of Christ on the earth with His resurrected saints. Satan is bound in a real, complete sense. The saints reign in a real, physical kingdom. This was the dominant view of the early church. Justin Martyr, writing in the second century, argued directly from Old Testament prophecy that a literal earthly reign was still coming. Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp who himself knew the Apostle John, held the same view. So did Tertullian. These were not fringe voices. They were the voices closest to the source.

The **amillennial** view was developed most fully by Augustine in the fifth century and became the dominant view in the Catholic Church and much of Protestantism from the Reformation onward. In this reading, the thousand years is symbolic of the current church age between Christ's first and second comings. The binding of Satan refers to the restriction of his power through the cross and the gospel. The saints who reign are believers who have died and are currently reigning with Christ in heaven. The millennium, in other words, is not a future event. It is happening right now.

The **postmillennial** view expects the church's gospel mission to gradually transform the world, ushering in a golden age of Christian influence on earth before Christ returns. The thousand years describes that era of gospel triumph. Christ returns after it ends. This view was more common in the 17th and 18th centuries among some Reformed theologians who were optimistic about the spread of Christianity.

Why We Hold the Premillennial View

As a church we hold the premillennial view, and we believe the text of Revelation supports it most naturally. Here is why.

The first reason is sequence. Revelation is a book that moves forward. Chapter 19 describes the return of Christ, the defeat of the beast and false prophet, and their being thrown into the lake of fire. Then chapter 20 opens. Then Satan is bound. That is the order on the page. To read the binding of Satan as something that happened at the cross requires you to step back in time after chapter 19 has already moved past that point. The narrative does not give you a natural reason to do that.

The second reason is the language of the binding itself. Look at what John says. Satan is seized. He is bound with a great chain. He is thrown into the Abyss. The Abyss is locked. The Abyss is sealed. Five distinct actions. That is not the language of limited or partial restraint. That is the language of total containment. If this describes Satan's current condition during the church age, it is hard to square with the rest of the New Testament's testimony. Paul writes in [Ephesians 2:2](#) that Satan is currently "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." Peter warns in [1 Peter 5:8](#) that he "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." John himself writes in [1 John 5:19](#) that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one." Those are not descriptions of a being who is locked in an abyss and sealed over. The binding described here is something categorically different from anything happening right now.

The third reason is the repetition. John mentions the thousand years six times in this passage. Six times. That kind of repetition in apocalyptic writing is not accidental. It is emphasis. John wants you to notice this. He wants you to hold onto it. A writer who mentions a number six times in six verses is not trying to be vague about it.

Now, a word of honesty about the number itself. The word "thousand" in Scripture sometimes functions as a round number pointing to completeness or vastness rather than a precise calendar count. [Psalm 50:10](#) says God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. [Deuteronomy 7:9](#) describes God keeping covenant to a thousand generations. In apocalyptic writing especially, numbers often carry theological weight beyond the strictly literal. So I hold the premillennial view with confidence, and I hold the precise calendar length with a degree of humility.

What the Millennium Is For

It is worth asking why the millennium exists at all. Why not go straight from Christ's return to the final judgment and the new creation? Why a thousand years in between?

Several things are worth noting here. The millennium is the fulfillment of a long line of Old Testament promises about an earthly reign of the Messiah with His people. [Psalm 2](#) describes the nations given to the Son as His inheritance. [Isaiah 11:1-9](#) describes a coming age of peace

where the wolf lies down with the lamb and the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 65:17–25 paints a picture of restored creation, long life, meaningful work, and God's presence with His people. Zechariah 14:9 declares that "the LORD will be king over the whole earth." These promises were not exhausted by the cross or the church age. They are waiting for a physical, historical fulfillment. The millennium is that fulfillment.

There is also a demonstration purpose. The millennium shows, in real time and on real earth, what human society looks like when Christ reigns directly and Satan is removed from the picture entirely. No deception. No corruption. No counterfeit kingdoms demanding worship. Just the King and His people. That is not a small thing. It is the answer to every question human history has ever asked about whether justice is possible, whether peace is possible, whether the world could be different. The millennium says: yes. Under this King, it can be. And it will be.

4. The Thrones and the Reigning Saints (v. 4)

Then I saw thrones, and the people seated on them had been given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony about 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 hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. — Revelation 20:4 (BSB)

John sees thrones. And people seated on them.

Pause there before moving to who is sitting on them. The image of thrones being set in place for judgment is one of the most loaded images in all of apocalyptic literature. It goes directly back to Daniel 7.

In Daniel 7, Daniel sees a vision of four great beasts coming up out of the sea. Each beast represents a world empire. They are terrifying. They are powerful. They devour and crush and trample. And just when the fourth beast seems unstoppable, Daniel sees the scene shift. Look at what he sees in verses 9 and 10:

"As I watched, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took His seat. His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before Him. Thousands upon thousands attended Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened." — Daniel 7:9–10 (BSB)

Thrones set in place. Court seated. Books opened. The beasts with all their power and terror answer to this scene. They always did. They just did not know it yet.

Then look at [Daniel 7:22](#). After describing the horn making war against the holy ones and prevailing against them, Daniel writes that the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

Judgment in favor of the holy ones. The time came when they possessed the kingdom.

John's readers in Asia Minor knew Daniel. They had grown up with these texts. And when John writes "I saw thrones, and the people seated on them had been given authority to judge," they would have recognized it immediately. This is [Daniel 7](#) arriving. What Daniel saw in a vision is now happening. The thrones are set. The court is seated. And the ones seated on them are not the beast's kings. They are the saints.

There is more Old Testament background here worth drawing out. [Psalm 149:5-9](#) says:

"Let the faithful exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with iron shackles, to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all His faithful people." — [Psalm 149:5-9](#) (BSB)

This is the glory of all His faithful people. Not just a few special saints. All of them. The faithful who praised God through their suffering are the ones who receive this authority. The ones who sang in the darkness get to reign in the light.

Who Is Seated on the Thrones

John sees two groups in verse 4.

The first group is those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus and for the word of God. These are the martyrs. They showed up much earlier in Revelation, back in chapter 6, under the altar. They cried out: "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?" They were given white robes and told to wait a little longer. That was chapters ago. A long time ago in the narrative. And now here they are. Not under the altar anymore. On thrones. The ones who asked how long have their answer. This long. Until the rider wins and the chains go on and the thrones are set.

The second group is broader. Those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or hands. This is not limited to martyrs. This is everyone who stayed faithful. The ones who refused the mark, who would not bow to the beast's image, who absorbed the economic and social cost of belonging to Jesus in a world run by Babylon. They did not all lose their heads. Many of them just lost their livelihoods. Their relationships. Their standing in the community. They chose faithfulness over comfort, day after day, in ways that nobody celebrated and nobody recorded. And John sees them on thrones.

Both groups come to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years.

Feel the weight of that.

The person who was beheaded for saying Jesus is Lord rather than Caesar is Lord. The person who lost their spot in the trade guild and could not buy or sell because they would not burn the incense. The person who watched friends walk away and family members turn against them because they would not compromise. The person who prayed through the night asking God whether any of it mattered. Those people are on thrones. They are not spectators in the millennium. They are not background figures. They are reigning. They have authority. They are with their King in a kingdom where the beast is gone and the dragon is in chains and there is nothing left to fear.

This promise was personal to the churches of Asia Minor. It is personal to us.

Think about what you have held on through. The season where faithfulness was genuinely costly. The moment where you could have taken the easier road and chose not to. The long slow grind of staying committed to Jesus when the surrounding culture was pulling in a different direction. Revelation 20:4 is addressed to you. Not in a vague, inspirational way. In a real, concrete, promised way. The ones who held on get to reign. The ones who refused to bow down get to sit down. With their King. For a thousand years. In a kingdom that no enemy can touch.

That is where this is going.

5. The First Resurrection (vv. 5–6)

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. — Revelation 20:5–6 (BSB)

John introduces a distinction here that will shape everything in the rest of the chapter. The first resurrection and the second death. Two firsts. Two seconds. Moving in completely opposite directions.

The resurrection of the dead was not a new idea when John wrote this. It was a well-established hope in Jewish thought, rooted in a long line of Old Testament promises. And it had been sharpened by the resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus rose from the dead, He was not just doing something miraculous. He was doing something the whole Old Testament had been pointing toward. For the believers in Asia Minor reading this letter, His resurrection was the proof that everything God promised about death and life was true.

The first resurrection here is the physical resurrection of the saints who reign during the millennium. John says it plainly. This is the first resurrection. The people he described in verse 4 came to life. That is physical language. Their resurrection is distinct from the general resurrection that comes later at the great white throne. Two resurrections. Separated by a thousand years.

The Old Testament Background

Isaiah 26:19 is one of the clearest promises in the Old Testament pointing to this moment:

"Your dead will live; their bodies will rise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust! For your dew is like the dew of the morning, and the earth will give birth to her dead." — Isaiah 26:19 (BSB)

Dawn language. Dew of the morning. The earth giving birth. This is not the language of defeat. It is the language of something new beginning after a long night. Isaiah saw a bodily resurrection coming. John sees it arriving.

Ezekiel 37 gives us the most vivid picture. God brings Ezekiel to a valley of dry bones and asks him: can these bones live? Ezekiel prophesies. The bones rattle together. Tendons appear. Flesh forms. Breath enters. And a vast army stands on its feet. Ezekiel 37 is primarily about Israel's national restoration after exile. But the imagery is unmistakable. Dry bones do not intimidate God. When He breathes, the dead stand up. That same God looks at every grave belonging to His people and sees a vast army waiting to rise.

Daniel 12:1-2 brings the most direct parallel:

"And many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and others to shame and everlasting contempt." — Daniel 12:2 (BSB)

Two resurrections. Two destinies. Daniel saw the outline. Revelation 20 fills in the details. And the book mentioned in Daniel 12:1, the one containing the names of those who will be delivered, is the same Book of Life that appears at the great white throne in verse 12.

The Five Blessings of Verse 6

John says five things about those who share in the first resurrection.

They are blessed. This is the fifth of seven beatitudes in Revelation. A blessing lands here at the moment of resurrection. Not just fortunate. Blessed in the deepest biblical sense. Favored by God.

They are holy. This is not a call to behavior. It is a declaration of identity. God has made them holy. Fully and permanently.

The second death has no power over them. The second death is the lake of fire, named explicitly in verse 14. For those in the first resurrection, it has no claim whatsoever. Death tried once. It failed. It will never try again.

They will be priests of God and of Christ. This goes back to Exodus 19:6, where God called Israel at Sinai to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. That was always the calling. Direct access to God. Representing Him to the world. Israel could not sustain it. But in the millennium it is fully realized. The saints are priests in resurrection bodies, in a kingdom where the dragon is in chains and there is nothing left to corrupt.

They will reign with Him for a thousand years. This is the sixth time John mentions the thousand years. He is not letting go of it. The reigning is real. And the One they reign with is Jesus.

Priests and kings. Both. Together. With Christ.

Everyone in this room has had a moment where following Jesus felt costly and the promises felt far away. You stayed faithful when nobody noticed. You prayed prayers that seemed to go nowhere. You held on when it would have been easier to let go.

Revelation 20:6 is addressed to you. The ones who held on get to reign. The ones who refused to bow down get to sit down. With their King. In a kingdom that no enemy can touch.

The first resurrection is the saints finally coming home. And the One waiting for them on the other side of it is the same Jesus they trusted and followed through everything.

He kept every promise He ever made. He is keeping this one too.

Key Themes

The enemy who seemed unstoppable is in chains. Every generation has watched evil look permanent and immovable. Every generation of believers has had its version of Rome. Its version of the dragon's power arrayed against the church. And every generation has needed to hear what Revelation 20 says. He is bound. He is locked away. He is sealed in. The power behind every system that has ever opposed God and His people ends up in chains in an abyss. That is not wishful thinking. That is the testimony of the One who is Faithful and True.

The saints who suffered get to reign. The millennium is not just a theological timeline to debate. It is the answer to the cry of the martyrs under the altar. How long? This long. Until the rider wins the war and the chains go on and the thrones are set. The people who lost the most get to reign the longest. That is the justice of God on full display.

The first resurrection changes everything. Death is not the end for the people of God. It never was. Isaiah saw it coming. Ezekiel saw dry bones rise. Daniel saw two different resurrections leading to two different destinies. And John sees the first resurrection arrive. The saints come to life. They are with their King. The second death has no claim on them. The grave does not win. For everyone in this room who has buried someone who belonged to Jesus, this is not small comfort. This is a promised reunion in a kingdom that has no end.

This is where the whole story has been going. We have been in Revelation together for a long time now. We have watched Babylon fall. We have heard the hallelujahs of heaven. We have seen the rider on the white horse. And now we are here. The saints are on thrones. They are priests. They are reigning with Christ. Everything the book has been pointing toward is landing right here. This is the promise that kept the churches of Asia Minor going when Rome was pressing in on every side. And it is the same promise that keeps us going now.

Application

1. The binding of Satan is described in total terms. He is seized, chained, thrown into the Abyss, locked in, sealed over. He cannot deceive the nations during this period. But he is not bound yet. We are not in the millennium yet. He is still at work. 1 Peter 5:8 says he prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Where in your life right now is deception at work? What lies about God, about yourself, or about the future are you believing that are keeping you from living like someone who knows how this story ends?

2. The saints who reign in verse 4 are described in two ways. Some were killed for their faith. Others simply did not worship the beast and did not take the mark. The second group did not die as martyrs. They just stayed faithful under pressure. That is the category most of us will fall into. Faithfulness in ordinary, sustained, costly ways. What does that look like for you right now? What pressure are you under to compromise in small ways? And what would it mean to hold the line the way the saints in verse 4 did?
3. John says the saints will be priests of God and of Christ. A priest is someone who has direct access to God and represents Him to others. That is not just a future role. It is your identity right now as a believer. You already have direct access to God through Jesus. You are already called to represent Him in the world. Are you living like a priest? Are you using the access you have? Are you taking seriously the role of representing Christ to the people around you?
4. The promise of the millennium is the promise of being with Jesus. Not just in heaven in some vague sense. With Him. Reigning with Him. Serving alongside Him. Think about the fact that the One you have been following, praying to, and trusting through every hard season of your life is the One you will reign with. What does it do to your relationship with Jesus right now to know that this is where it is going? Does your daily life with Him reflect that kind of closeness and anticipation?

Closing

The war is over. The rider has won. The beast and the false prophet are in the lake of fire.

And now this.

An angel with a key and a great chain descends from heaven. The dragon, that ancient serpent, the devil, Satan, is seized. Bound. Thrown into the Abyss. Locked in. Sealed over.

And the saints take their thrones.

The ones who were beheaded. The ones who refused the mark. The ones who held on when holding on cost them everything. They come to life. They reign with their King. For a thousand years, with Satan unable to touch them, unable to deceive them, unable to oppose the kingdom in any way. They are priests. They are kings. They are with Jesus.

This is what the endurance was for. This is the destination the whole book has been pointing toward. Not just rescue from the beast. Not just Babylon's fall. Not just the wedding of the

Lamb. But this. The saints, on thrones, reigning with Christ, with no enemy left to face and no more waiting to do.

For the churches of Asia Minor, this chapter was the answer to every question suffering had asked them. You thought you were losing. You thought Rome was winning. You thought the beast had the upper hand. Here is the end of the story. The dragon is in chains. The thrones belong to the faithful. And the second death has no power over you.

Next week we turn to verses 7 through 10. The thousand years end. Satan is released. And one final rebellion rises up before it is put down forever. The war ended in chapter 19. But there is one more battle coming. And the outcome is not in doubt.

The King is still on the throne. He is not moving.