FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ESCHATOLOGY

The Doctrine of Last Things

He Who Was, and Who Is, and Who Is to Come

UNIT 4: THE MILLENNIUM AND ISRAEL IN BIBLICAL PROPHECY

Lessons 10–14: The Thousand Years, the Nation, and the Promises of God

Lesson 10

REVELATION 20 AND THE MILLENNIUM

The Most Contested Passage in Eschatology Examined on Its Own Terms

An Exegetical, Canonical, and Theological Examination of Revelation 20:1–10 and the Amillennial Interpretation

"The thousand years of Revelation 20 must be read within the book that contains it, the canon that surrounds it, and the apostolic tradition that interprets it — not as a blank canvas for prophetic imagination."

Key Texts: Revelation 20:1–10; 19:11–21; Revelation 1:1–3; Matthew 12:29; John 12:31; Luke 10:18; Ephesians 1:20–23; Romans 8:1

> *"Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."*
>
> **Titus 2:13, NASB 1995**

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Introduction

Unit 4 addresses the most contested and most practically consequential set of questions in the evangelical eschatological debate: the meaning of the thousand years in Revelation 20:1–10, the nature of biblical prophecy concerning the nation of Israel, and the relationship between the various millennial positions and the apostolic hermeneutic established in Lesson 2. These questions have divided evangelical Christians for two centuries, generated an enormous body of scholarly and popular literature, and produced eschatological frameworks that differ from one another not merely in peripheral details but in their most fundamental interpretive assumptions. The student who arrives at this unit with the foundations of Units 1–3 securely in place is now equipped to engage these questions with the exegetical rigor, historical awareness, and hermeneutical discipline they deserve.

This lesson, the first of five in Unit 4, focuses on the passage that is the center of gravity of the entire millennial debate: Revelation 20:1–10. Every millennial position derives its name from the "millennium", the thousand years, described in these ten verses. It is the one passage in the entire Bible that explicitly speaks of a thousand-year reign, and its interpretation is therefore determinative for the entire millennial question. Premillennialists argue that the thousand years is a future earthly kingdom to be established at Christ's return; amillennialists argue that it is the present inter-advent period of Christ's heavenly reign; postmillennialists argue that it is a future golden age of gospel triumph within history. Each position claims to be the most faithful reading of the passage. This lesson will make the case that the amillennial reading is the most exegetically disciplined, most canonically consistent, and most historically grounded of the three options, while engaging the other positions with the respect and charity their serious advocates deserve.

The lesson proceeds under seven headings: the literary and canonical context of Revelation 20, which must be established before a single verse of the passage is interpreted; the structure and sequence of Revelation 19–20 and the recapitulation principle that governs the book's organization; the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1–3 and its relationship to the explicit New Testament texts that describe Christ's victory over the devil; the first resurrection in Revelation 20:4–6 and the amillennial identification of it with the spiritual resurrection of regeneration; the thousand years as a symbolic period and the evidence from Revelation's own numerical symbolism; the release of Satan and the final battle in Revelation 20:7–10; and the relationship between Revelation 20 and the broader New Testament eschatological structure, particularly the question of whether the passage requires a temporal gap between the *parousia* and the eternal state. Throughout, the aim is not merely to win an argument but to open a passage that is frequently approached with preconceived conclusions and to demonstrate that its most natural and most consistent reading is, in fact, the amillennial one.

A note about tone and posture is appropriate here. Revelation 20:1–10 is a passage about which godly, learned, and exegetically serious Christians have disagreed for centuries. This series holds the amillennial position with conviction and will defend it from the text. But it does so in the awareness that the premillennial tradition has produced some of the most faithful and most fruitful servants of Christ in the history of the church, and that the disagreement over Revelation 20 is a disagreement within the community of those who confess the bodily resurrection of Christ, the personal return of the Lord, the general resurrection of the dead, and the eternal judgment. The aim of this lesson is to demonstrate, as compellingly as the exegesis will allow, that the amillennial reading of Revelation 20 is correct, not to demean those who read it differently. Charity in the delivery, conviction in the content: that is the standard this lesson aspires to maintain throughout.

I. THE LITERARY AND CANONICAL CONTEXT OF REVELATION 20

How the Book of Revelation Must Be Read Before Revelation 20 Can Be Interpreted

A. The Genre and Purpose of Revelation

Before a single verse of Revelation 20 can be responsibly interpreted, the reader must establish the literary context within which the passage occurs. Revelation is not a coded newspaper of future events, not a prophetic timetable to be decoded by matching its symbols to contemporary geopolitical developments, and not a detailed historical chronicle of events in a linear sequence. It is a Jewish-Christian apocalypse, a genre with specific and well-established conventions that must govern its interpretation, as Lesson 2 established at length. Revelation's author, the Apostle John, received a series of visions on the island of Patmos and wrote them up in the form of a circular letter to seven specific churches in the Roman province of Asia, who were enduring the pressures of the imperial cult and the threat of persecution under the Emperor Domitian.

The book's opening verses establish its purpose and its hermeneutical frame: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John" (1:1). Two phrases are immediately significant for the interpretation of Revelation 20. First, "must soon take place" (dei genesthai en tachei): the visions are not primarily about events in the distant future but about realities that are imminent from the perspective of the original audience. Second, "communicated" (eshēmanen): the verb literally means "signified" or "made known through signs", the book communicates through symbolic imagery, not through straightforward historical description. From the outset, Revelation declares itself a symbolic communication to a first-century audience. This does not mean it has no relevance to later generations, quite the opposite; its timeless depiction of the cosmic conflict between Christ and the forces of darkness is powerfully relevant to every generation. But it does mean that the symbols must be read as symbols, not as photographs of future events.

The symbolic world of Revelation is drawn almost entirely from the Old Testament. A reader who is deeply familiar with Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Zechariah, and the Psalms will recognize the imagery on virtually every page. The four living creatures come from Ezekiel 1. The throne room vision draws on Isaiah 6 and Daniel 7. The woman clothed with the sun reflects the imagery of Joseph's dream (Genesis 37:9–10). The harlot Babylon recapitulates the prophetic oracles against historical Babylon and Tyre. The new Jerusalem of Revelation 21–22 reflects and consummates the eschatological temple-city vision of Ezekiel 40–48. The angel with the key who binds the dragon in Revelation 20:1–3 operates in the same symbolic space as the binding of the strong man in Matthew 12:29. To read Revelation without this Old Testament intertextual awareness is to read it blind, to mistake its rich symbolic vocabulary for either random imagery or literal description of physical events.

B. The Recapitulatory Structure of Revelation

The single most important structural observation for interpreting Revelation 20 is the recapitulatory principle that governs the book's organization. Revelation does not narrate the events of the inter-advent age and the consummation in a single, linear, chronological sequence. Instead, it presents multiple parallel visions, each covering the same period from a different perspective, with a different emphasis, and using a different set of

symbols. This recapitulation means that later visions do not necessarily follow chronologically from earlier ones; they revisit the same ground from a new vantage point.

The evidence for recapitulation in Revelation is extensive and widely recognized even by scholars who hold premillennial positions. The seven seals (chapters 6–8), the seven trumpets (chapters 8–11), and the seven bowls (chapters 15–16) each seem to conclude with the same climactic event, the final judgment, before the next series begins again. The visions of chapters 12–14 clearly revisit the inter-advent period from a cosmic perspective, even though the seals and trumpets have already moved through that period. The vision of the harlot Babylon's destruction (chapters 17–18) and the vision of the new Jerusalem's descent (chapters 21–22) are parallel visions of the end from opposite perspectives, destruction and construction, judgment and blessing. The recognition of this recapitulatory structure is not an ad hoc defensive maneuver by amillennialists; it is the standard tool of Revelation scholarship across all millennial positions. What it means for Revelation 20 is that the millennium of Revelation 20:1–10 need not be assumed to follow chronologically from the battle of Revelation 19:11–21. The two passages may be parallel visions covering the same or overlapping periods from different angles.

The canonical context of Revelation 20 within the book's larger structure is also significant. Chapters 19 and 20 together form a unit of eschatological visions that brings the book's central conflict to its resolution. Revelation 19:11–21 depicts the rider on the white horse, the Word of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, defeating the beast and the false prophet in battle. Revelation 20:1–10 depicts the binding and ultimate defeat of the dragon. Revelation 20:11–15 depicts the final judgment. Revelation 21–22 depicts the new creation. The question of whether the millennium of Revelation 20:1–10 occurs before or after the battle of Revelation 19:11–21, or whether they cover the same period from different perspectives, is the central exegetical question of the millennial debate, and answering it requires careful attention to both the book's recapitulatory structure and the specific content of each passage.

II. THE BINDING OF SATAN, REVELATION 20:1–3

What Does the Binding Mean, and When Did It Occur?

A. The Text of Revelation 20:1–3

The passage opens with a vision of dramatic heavenly action: "The I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding 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 he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time" (20:1–3). The angel descends from heaven with authority, the key of the abyss and the chain, and executes a binding that has a specific purpose: so that Satan "would not deceive the nations any longer." The binding is not total incapacitation of all satanic activity; it is specifically the restriction of his ability to deceive the nations. After the thousand years, he must be released for a short time.

The premillennial reading of this passage understands the binding as a future event, the restriction of Satan at the beginning of the millennium, which follows Christ's return. On this reading, the present age is characterized by Satan's active deception of the nations, the binding will occur at the *parousia* , and the millennium is the thousand-year period during which his deception is restricted. The amillennial reading, by contrast, understands the binding

as a present event, the restriction accomplished by Christ's first coming, specifically His defeat of the devil in His death and resurrection. On this reading, the present age is the millennium during which Satan's power to deceive the nations in the specific sense described in verse 3 has been restricted by the accomplishment of Christ's atoning and conquering work.

The key exegetical question is this: does the New Testament elsewhere describe a binding or restriction of Satan's power associated with the first coming of Christ? If it does, the amillennial reading has strong canonical support. If it does not, if the New Testament consistently presents the binding of Satan as a future event, then the premillennial reading gains force. The answer to this question is, on careful examination, clearly favorable to the amillennial reading. The New Testament's explicit binding language, particularly in Matthew 12:29, John 12:31, Luke 10:18, and Colossians 2:15, consistently associates the restriction of Satan's power with Christ's first coming, not with a future millennium.

B. *The New Testament's Binding Language and the First Coming of Christ*

Matthew 12:29 provides the closest parallel to the binding imagery of Revelation 20:1–3: "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house." Jesus speaks this parable in direct explanation of His own exorcistic ministry, which He has just described in verse 28 as evidence that "the kingdom of God has come upon you." The strong man is the devil; the binding is the restriction of his power; the plundering of his house is the liberation of those he held captive. And Jesus' argument is explicit: the exorcisms He is performing are evidence that the strong man has already been bound, that is how the plundering is possible. The binding, in Jesus' own teaching, is not a future event; it is the present reality that makes the present kingdom advance possible.

John 12:31 adds the cross as the decisive moment of Satan's defeat: "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." The "now" is emphatic and points to the imminent death of Jesus on the cross. The cross is not merely the atonement for human sin; it is simultaneously the judgment of this world and the casting out of its ruler. The same vocabulary, "cast out", appears in Revelation 12:9–10 for the devil's being cast down from heaven: "the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world." The connection between John 12:31 and Revelation 12:9 suggests that the casting down of Satan in Revelation 12 is the apocalyptic counterpart to what the cross accomplished, a reading consistent with the recapitulatory structure of Revelation, which presents the same inter-advent reality from multiple perspectives.

Luke 10:18 is perhaps the most dramatic of the first-coming binding texts: when the seventy return rejoicing that even the demons submit to them in Jesus' name, Jesus responds, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning." The aorist participle "falling" (pesonta) may suggest a moment of completed fall already observed by Jesus in the spiritual realm, the fall that the disciples' Spirit-empowered mission has made visible. Hebrews 2:14–15 makes the connection between the incarnation, the death, and the defeat of the devil most explicit: Christ took on flesh and blood "that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." The rendering powerless (katargeŋ) is the Hebrews counterpart to the binding of Revelation 20, and it occurred through the cross. Taken together, Matthew 12:29, John 12:31, Luke 10:18, Hebrews 2:14–15, and Colossians 2:15 form a consistent New Testament testimony that the decisive defeat and restriction of Satan's power occurred at the

first coming of Christ, specifically through His death and resurrection. Revelation 20:1–3 is the apocalyptic representation of that same reality.

III. THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF THE BINDING

The Nations and the Worldwide Advance of the Gospel

A. Deceiving the Nations No Longer

The specific purpose of Satan's binding in Revelation 20:3 is precise and exegetically significant: he is bound "so that he would not deceive the nations any longer." This is not a general restriction of all satanic activity; it is a specific restriction of his ability to deceive the nations in a particular way. The nations (ta ethne) in the Old Testament and in Revelation are the Gentile peoples of the world, the nations beyond Israel who were previously outside the scope of the covenant and who, under the old covenant arrangement, were "given over" to go their own ways (Acts 14:16), walking "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). The deception that bound them was the deception of idolatry, the worship of false gods that Paul identifies as the worship of demons (1 Corinthians 10:20).

The restriction of Satan's ability to deceive the nations in this specific sense is exactly what the worldwide advance of the gospel has accomplished in the inter-advent age. Before the coming of Christ, the Gentile nations were largely outside the reach of the covenant promises and under the dominion of the idolatrous deception that Satan had maintained. The coming of Christ, His death and resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost inaugurated the worldwide mission in which the gospel went out to all nations, dismantling the idolatrous deceptions of the old world and gathering the elect from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. This is precisely what Jesus describes in Matthew 28:18–20 as the consequence of the authority He received at the ascension: go and make disciples of all nations. The binding of Satan in the specific sense of Revelation 20:3, the restriction of his ability to prevent the gospel from reaching the nations, is the eschatological reality that makes the Great Commission possible. The strong man has been bound; his house can now be plundered.

The contrast between the pre-Christian and post-Christian situation of the nations is explicit in the New Testament. Acts 17:30 captures it with extraordinary concision: "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent." The "times of ignorance", the era before Christ's coming in which the nations were left in the darkness of their deception, have ended. God is now declaring that all people everywhere should repent, because the One through whom He will judge the world has been raised from the dead. The binding of Satan that allows this declaration to be made worldwide is not a future event; it is the present reality that the apostolic mission is built upon. The premillennial objection, that Satan is clearly not fully bound in the present age because he continues to deceive individuals and communities, misses the specific scope of the binding. Satan is not bound from all activity; he is bound from preventing the worldwide advance of the gospel to all nations. And the evidence of that specific binding is the two-thousand-year history of the gospel's spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

B. The Abyss and Its Significance

The abyss (abyssos) into which Satan is bound in Revelation 20:3 is the deep, the bottomless pit, the realm of demonic confinement in Jewish apocalyptic literature (cf. Luke 8:31, where the demons beg Jesus not to command them to go into the abyss; Revelation 9:1–2, where the abyss is the source from which the demonic locusts emerge at the fifth trumpet). The sealing of the abyss over Satan communicates the security and the completeness of the binding: this is not a loose restraint but an effective confinement that prevents the specific activity it is designed to prevent. The angel with the key has authority over the abyss, and the angel acts at the direction of the One who holds the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18), the risen Christ who has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18).

The premillennial objection to the amillennial binding interpretation frequently focuses on the apparent severity of the present age's spiritual darkness: if Satan is bound, why does he still "prowl around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8)? The answer, as established above, is that the binding of Revelation 20:3 is specifically targeted at a particular activity, deceiving the nations to prevent the gospel's universal advance, and not at all satanic activity in general. The New Testament's own picture of the inter-advent age is one in which Satan remains active, dangerous, and to be resisted (Ephesians 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8–9), but in which his ability to prevent the gospel from reaching every nation has been decisively restricted by the power of the risen Christ. These two realities are not in contradiction; they are the two faces of the inter-advent age's already/not yet character. Satan is bound in the specific sense of Revelation 20:3; he is not bound in the general sense of complete inactivity. The binding is real and effective for its stated purpose; it is not complete and total incapacitation.

The release of Satan for a short time at the end of the thousand years (v. 3b) anticipates the escalating intensity of anti-kingdom activity that 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 12 describe as characteristic of the period immediately preceding the *parousia*. As the inter-advent age moves toward the consummation, the restraint that has been holding back the full intensity of the mystery of lawlessness is removed (2 Thessalonians 2:7), the dragon's fury intensifies knowing that his time is short (Revelation 12:12), and the final confrontation between the Lamb and the dragon approaches. The release is not a reversal of the binding's effectiveness; it is the final, brief intensification of the conflict that immediately precedes the dragon's complete and permanent defeat at the *parousia*.

IV. THE FIRST RESURRECTION, REVELATION 20:4–6

The Most Exegetically Contested Element of the Passage

A. The Vision of the Thrones and the Souls

The most exegetically contested element of the entire Revelation 20 passage is the "first resurrection" of verses 4–6: "Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their 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 on their forehead and on 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; 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" (vv. 4–6).

The premillennial reading understands the first resurrection as the bodily resurrection of the righteous dead at the beginning of the millennium, which precedes by a thousand years the second resurrection of the wicked dead at the end of the millennium. On this reading, verse 5's "the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed" is the strongest single argument for premillennialism in the entire passage: if there is a period of a thousand years between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked, then a millennium must intervene between the *parousia* and the general resurrection of the dead. The amillennial reading understands the first resurrection as the spiritual resurrection of regeneration, the new birth by which the soul that was dead in trespasses and sins is made alive in Christ, and the "reigning with Christ for a thousand years" as the present experience of the church in the inter-advent age.

The amillennial identification of the first resurrection with the new birth draws support from several converging lines of exegetical and canonical evidence. First, the text itself describes John seeing "souls" (psychas) in the vision, not bodies. The martyrs who come to life are souls, not resurrected bodies. If this were a description of the general bodily resurrection of the righteous, we would expect the vision to describe bodies coming out of graves, as the vision of Revelation 20:12–13 does for the general resurrection at the final judgment. Second, the language of "coming to life" (ezasan) is used in the New Testament for spiritual resurrection, coming alive in Christ through regeneration, as well as for bodily resurrection, and the context of the vision favors the spiritual sense. Third, the specific category of those who "reign with Christ for a thousand years", the martyrs and those who refused the beast's mark, is best understood as a representative description of all who have died in faith rather than a literal restriction to martyrs only; they are the model and representative of the faithful community throughout the inter-advent age.

B. *The Johannine Precedent for Spiritual Resurrection Language*

The most important canonical evidence for the amillennial interpretation of the first resurrection is the Johannine precedent for using resurrection language to describe the spiritual vivification of the new birth. John 5:24–25 is the decisive text: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." The present-tense resurrection described here, "an hour is coming and now is", is the spiritual resurrection of those who hear Christ's word and believe, passing from death to life. This stands in deliberate contrast to the future bodily resurrection described in the immediately following verses 28–29: "an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth." The "now is" of the spiritual resurrection and the future "hour is coming" of the bodily resurrection are two distinct things in John's own Gospel.

Ephesians 2:5–6 provides the Pauline parallel: "even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The language of being made alive (suzoopoiesen), raised up (synegeiren), and seated with Christ in the heavenly places is resurrection language applied to the believer's present spiritual condition, not to a future bodily event. The believer who has been regenerated has already been made alive, raised up, and enthroned with Christ in the heavenly places. This is precisely the language of "coming to life and reigning with Christ" that Revelation 20:4 uses of those who share the first resurrection. The Pauline and Johannine precedents for using resurrection and enthronement language of the believer's present spiritual

condition provide a strong canonical warrant for reading the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4–6 as the spiritual resurrection of regeneration.

The amillennialist must acknowledge the genuine difficulty of verse 5: "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed." If the first resurrection is the spiritual resurrection of the regenerate, who are "the rest of the dead" who do not come to life during the thousand years? The amillennial answer is that "the rest of the dead" are the unregenerate, those who have never experienced the first resurrection (the new birth), who will only "come to life" in the sense of standing before the judgment seat at the general resurrection at the end of the age. They do not experience the spiritual resurrection of regeneration during the inter-advent period. This reading requires that the language of "coming to life" (verse 5) be understood in a different sense than verse 4's "came to life", the first referring to regeneration (positive) and the second referring to the general resurrection that brings both righteous and wicked to judgment. While this involves a semantic distinction within the same passage, it is consistent with the Johannine precedent of John 5:24–29, where "coming to life" refers to two different events in close proximity.

V. THE THOUSAND YEARS AS A SYMBOLIC PERIOD

Numerical Symbolism in the Book of Revelation

A. How Revelation Uses Numbers

One of the most important hermeneutical observations for the interpretation of Revelation 20 is the way the book of Revelation uses numbers throughout. Revelation employs numerical symbolism extensively and consistently: seven is the number of completeness and divine perfection (seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, seven spirits of God); twelve is the number of the covenant people of God (twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles, the twelve gates of the new Jerusalem, the twelve foundations); four is the number of the created order and the world (four living creatures, four corners of the earth, four winds); three and a half, whether as three and a half years, forty-two months, or 1,260 days, is the number of the period of tribulation, calculated as half of seven (the full number of completeness cut short); and one thousand is the number of completeness, fullness, and vastness (Psalm 50:10, "the cattle on a thousand hills"; Deuteronomy 7:9, "A thousand generations"; 2 Peter 3:8, "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years").

In the symbolic world of Revelation, the number one thousand signifies fullness, completeness, and vast duration, not a specific chronological period of exactly one thousand solar years. This is not an imposition of a foreign hermeneutic upon the text; it is the application of the book's own numerical conventions to the thousand years of chapter 20. The fact that the period is described as "one thousand years" rather than as the more commonly used "three and a half years" or "forty-two months" is itself significant: the thousand years is not the period of tribulation (half of seven) but the full, complete, undiminished period of Christ's reign between His first and second comings, the period in which the strong man has been bound and the nations are being plundered for the kingdom of God. The thousand years is the apocalyptic way of saying: the present reign of Christ, however long it lasts in chronological time, is the full and complete period appointed for the advance of the gospel before the consummation.

The objection that "thousand" should be read literally because there is no explicit signal in the text that it is symbolic fails to reckon with the genre of the book in which it appears. Revelation is a symbolic book from beginning to end; the burden of proof lies with the reader who wishes to insist that a particular symbol is literal, not with the reader who reads it symbolically. When John sees "a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes" (Revelation 5:6), no one argues for a literal seven-horned animal; the symbolic reading is self-evident from the genre. When John sees the prostitute Babylon sitting on seven hills (Revelation 17:9), no one argues that a literal city on exactly seven hills is required; the symbolic reference to Rome is recognized by most interpreters. The same hermeneutical principle applies to the thousand years: in a book that communicates through symbols, the burden of proof lies with those who insist that this one particular number is literal while every other number in the book is symbolic.

B. *The Thousand Years as the Inter-Advent Period*

On the amillennial reading, the thousand years of Revelation 20:1–10 represents the entire inter-advent period, the age between Christ's first and second comings, during which Satan's power to deceive the nations has been restricted by the accomplishment of Christ's atoning work, and during which the saints who have died in faith "reign with Christ" in the blessed intermediate state. The thousand years is not a literal ten centuries but the full, symbolically complete duration of the present age, however long in chronological terms it actually extends. This understanding is supported by the observation that Revelation 20's thousand years fits precisely within the two-age eschatological framework that the rest of the New Testament presents: the present age (from the first coming to the second coming) and the age to come (from the second coming onward). The thousand years is the present age, described in its apocalyptic fullness and completeness.

The saints who "reign with Christ" during the thousand years in Revelation 20:4–6 are, on the amillennial reading, the martyred saints and all who have died in faith during the inter-advent period, now in the blessed intermediate state described in Revelation 6:9–11 and Hebrews 12:22–24. They reign with Christ in the sense of Ephesians 2:6, seated with Him in the heavenly places, and in the sense of 2 Timothy 2:12, "if we endure, we will also reign with Him." The present heavenly reign of the departed saints is not a peripheral or obscure doctrine; it is the specific way Revelation 20 describes the present heaven's character. The souls under the altar of Revelation 6:9–11 are the same community as the souls on the thrones of Revelation 20:4, those who died for their testimony and who now reign with Christ during the inter-advent age, waiting for the resurrection that will complete what the first resurrection has begun.

The specifically priestly character of the saints' reign deserves notice: "they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years" (v. 6). The combination of priestly and royal functions reflects the new covenant identity of the entire people of God, the royal priesthood of 1 Peter 2:9, the kingdom and priests of Revelation 1:6 and 5:10. This is not a description of a specific office or role restricted to the martyred saints in a future millennium; it is the eschatological identity of the community of the new covenant, fully realized in the intermediate state for those who have already died in faith and being realized in anticipation for those who are still living. The saints of the present heaven exercise their priestly reign by their intercession (the prayers rising as incense before the throne, Revelation 5:8; 8:3–4) and their participation in the worship that surrounds the throne (Revelation 4–5; 7:9–17). This is kingdom reign in its fullest present form.

VI. THE RELEASE OF SATAN AND THE FINAL BATTLE, REVELATION 20:7–10

The End of the Inter-Advent Age and the Parousia 's Victory

A. The Release, the Deception, and Gog and Magog

The thousand years completed, Satan is released from his prison and goes 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" (v. 8). The scope of the deception is universal, all four corners of the earth, a number like the sand of the seashore, and the assembled forces march up across the broad plain of the earth and surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city. Gog and Magog appear in Ezekiel 38–39 as the archetypical enemies of God's people from the distant north, the nations that represent the totality of anti-kingdom hostility. In Revelation 20, they are not to be identified with specific modern nations or geopolitical entities; they are the apocalyptic symbol for all the forces that are arrayed against the community of God's people at the end of the age.

The release of Satan at the end of the thousand years represents the final, brief intensification of anti-kingdom hostility that characterizes the period immediately preceding the *parousia* . This corresponds to the release of the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2:7–8, the short time of Satan's great wrath in Revelation 12:12, and the great tribulation that Jesus describes as preceding the coming of the Son of Man in Matthew 24:21–22. The inter-advent age does not end with the gradual triumph of the gospel over all opposition; it ends with an intensification of the conflict, a final gathering of all anti-kingdom forces under the banner of the dragon, and the apparent encirclement of the saints, before the immediate and total intervention of God that obliterates the assembled armies and casts the devil into the lake of fire.

The "camp of the saints and the beloved city" that the nations surround is the apocalyptic symbol for the church of Jesus Christ, the community of the King described throughout Revelation as the woman in the wilderness, the witnesses in the city, and the servants of the Lamb. The city's encirclement recalls the pattern of Zechariah 14, where all the nations gather against Jerusalem before the Lord intervenes in decisive judgment. The pattern is consistent: the community of faith, vulnerable and apparently surrounded by overwhelming hostility, is rescued not by human power but by the direct and decisive intervention of the One who sits on the throne.

B. The Immediate and Total Defeat and the Lake of Fire

The final battle of Revelation 20:9–10 is not a battle in the conventional military sense. It is an instantaneous and total judgment: "And fire came down from heaven and devoured them." There is no extended conflict, no drawn-out struggle, no uncertainty about the outcome. The fire from heaven, echoing the divine judgments of Sodom (Genesis 19:24), Elijah's fire on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:38), and the fire from the altar of Revelation 8:5, falls immediately and completely, devouring the assembled forces of the dragon in a moment. The victory of God over the assembled enemies of His people requires no human military contribution; it is the act of the One who sits on the throne, whose sovereignty over all the nations is absolute and whose patience with the dragon's deception has finally, irreversibly, and completely run out.

The devil who deceived them is then thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet already are, and he will be tormented day and night forever and ever. The lake of fire is the final and permanent place of judgment for all who have opposed the kingdom of God: the beast and the false prophet at the *parousia* (19:20), the devil at the conclusion of the final battle (20:10), and finally death and Hades themselves at the great white throne judgment (20:14). The sequence makes clear that the lake of fire is the terminus of the entire history of anti-kingdom opposition, the permanent, irreversible, and eternal outcome of every power that lifted itself against the Lamb. There is no parole, no escape, no subsequent reprieve. The dragon's short time has ended, and the rest is silence before the eternal reign of the Lamb.

The temporal adverb "forever and ever" (eis tous aionas ton aionon) applied to the devil's torment in the lake of fire is the same phrase used for the eternal reign of Christ (Revelation 11:15) and the eternal reign of the saints (Revelation 22:5). The symmetry is intentional: the kingdom's eternity and the devil's torment are described with the same language of unending duration. What the kingdom does without ceasing, the devil suffers without ceasing. What is joy for the one is judgment for the other. And both are permanent: neither the kingdom nor the condemnation admits of any future termination. The eternal state, in its full Revelation perspective, is an eternal simultaneity of blessing for the redeemed and suffering for the condemned, a simultaneity that the rest of the New Testament confirms and that the justice of God requires.

VII. REVELATION 20 AND THE BROADER NEW TESTAMENT ESCHATOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

Does Revelation 20 Require a Third Stage Between the Parousia and the Eternal State?

A. The New Testament's Two-Age Framework

The central structural question raised by Revelation 20 for the millennial debate is this: does the passage require the insertion of a third stage, an intermediate earthly millennium, between the *parousia* and the eternal state, or does it fit within the New Testament's consistent two-age framework (the present age and the age to come, with no intermediate stage)? This question is not merely exegetical; it is hermeneutical. It asks whether Revelation 20, interpreted in the context of the whole New Testament's eschatological testimony, requires us to revise the two-stage framework that every other New Testament eschatological passage presents.

The New Testament's consistent two-age framework, this age and the age to come, with no intermediate stage, has been established throughout this series. Matthew 12:32 contrasts "this age" with "the age to come." Ephesians 1:21 speaks of Christ's authority extending over "not only in this age but also in the one to come." Luke 20:34–36 contrasts "this age" (in which people marry and are given in marriage) with "that age and the resurrection from the dead." 1 Corinthians 15:23–28 describes a sequence in which "then comes the end" immediately follows the *parousia* with no millennium inserted. Hebrews 6:5 speaks of those who have tasted "the powers of the age to come," implying that the present age and the age to come are the two categories without a third. The New Testament knows two ages, not three. Revelation 20 is the one passage in the entire New Testament that appears to require a third stage. The question is whether that appearance is the result of a correct reading of the passage or of a prior commitment to a premillennial framework that has been imported into the reading.

The amillennial answer is that Revelation 20 does not require a third stage when it is read within the book's own recapitulatory structure, within its own numerical symbolism, within the apostolic hermeneutic established in the rest of the New Testament, and with the identification of the first resurrection as the spiritual resurrection of regeneration. On this reading, Revelation 20 describes the present inter-advent age from a heavenly perspective: the binding of Satan, the reign of the saints in the present heaven, and the final release and defeat of the dragon at the end of the age. This reading does not require a third stage; it places Revelation 20 fully within the two-age framework that the rest of the New Testament presents, reading it as an apocalyptic portrait of the inter-advent age's character and outcome.

B. *Engaging the Premillennial Arguments Charitably*

The premillennial position on Revelation 20 draws its strongest exegetical support from verse 5: "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed." The argument is that this verse explicitly separates the resurrection of the righteous (verse 4) from the resurrection of the wicked (verse 5) by a thousand years, and that this temporal gap requires the premillennial insertion of a millennium between the *parousia* and the general resurrection. The argument has genuine force, and the amillennialist must engage it seriously rather than dismissing it.

The amillennial response is threefold. First, as established in Section IV.B, the Johannine precedent of John 5:24–29 establishes that "caming to life" (zao) can refer to two different events, the spiritual resurrection of regeneration and the bodily resurrection of the last day, in close proximity within the same passage. If the same precedent applies in Revelation 20, verse 4's "came to life" (spiritual resurrection) and verse 5's "come to life" (bodily resurrection at the judgment) refer to two different types of "coming to life" rather than two stages of the same bodily resurrection. Second, the structural argument: if the premillennial reading of Revelation 20 requires inserting a third stage into the New Testament's consistent two-age framework, the burden of proof is on the premillennialist to explain why this single passage in an apocalyptic book should overturn the eschatological structure that every other New Testament passage presents. Third, the internal Revelation argument: the final judgment of Revelation 20:11–15 occurs immediately after the release and defeat of Satan (vv. 7–10) with no temporal gap for the establishment of an earthly millennium. The narrative sequence of Revelation 20 itself appears to move from the binding of Satan (vv. 1–3) to the reign of the saints (vv. 4–6) to the release and defeat of Satan (vv. 7–10) to the final judgment (vv. 11–15) without a millennium separating the defeat from the judgment.

This lesson has made the exegetical case for the amillennial reading of Revelation 20:1–10 with as much precision and care as the space allows. The case is not airtight, no exegetical case for any contested passage is. But it is grounded in the text, consistent with the canonical and theological context, and aligned with the dominant reading of the passage in the history of the church's interpretation. The premillennial position has genuine exegetical advocates, and this series engages it with respect. But the conclusion reached here, and the conclusion that will be developed further in the subsequent lessons of this unit, is that the amillennial reading of Revelation 20 is the most faithful, most canonically consistent, and most hermeneutically disciplined option available. The thousand years is the present inter-advent age; the first resurrection is the spiritual resurrection of the new birth; the reigning saints are the community of the present heaven; and the final defeat of Satan is the consummating event of the inter-advent age's conflict. Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus.

> *"They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; 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."*
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> **Revelation 20:4b, 6, NASB 1995**

Theological Terms and Definitions

Millennium	From the Latin mille (thousand) and annum (year): the thousand-year period described in Revelation 20:1–10 during which Satan is bound and the saints reign with Christ. The interpretation of this period is the defining issue of the millennial debate: premillennialists hold it is a future earthly kingdom following the *parousia*; amillennialists hold it is the present inter-advent period of Christ's heavenly reign; postmillennialists hold it is a future golden age of gospel triumph within history.
Amillennialism	The eschatological position that identifies the millennium of Revelation 20 with the entire inter-advent period, the age between Christ's first and second comings, during which Christ reigns from heaven and the saints in the present heaven reign with Him. The first resurrection is the spiritual resurrection of regeneration; the binding of Satan is the restriction accomplished at Christ's first coming; the consummation occurs at the single *parousia*, immediately followed by the resurrection, judgment, and eternal state.
Premillennialism	The eschatological position that holds that Christ will return before (pre-) the millennium to establish a visible, earthly, thousand-year kingdom. The first resurrection is the bodily resurrection of the righteous at the beginning of the millennium; the binding of Satan is a future restriction at the *parousia*; after the millennium, the wicked are resurrected and the final judgment occurs. Two major forms: historic premillennialism (no rapture distinction) and dispensational premillennialism (pretribulational rapture and Israel-church distinction).
Recapitulation (in Revelation)	The structural principle that Revelation presents multiple parallel visions covering the same period (the inter-advent age) from different perspectives, with different emphases and different symbolic imagery, rather than narrating eschatological events in strict chronological sequence. Widely recognized in Revelation scholarship across millennial positions. Implies that Revelation 20's millennium need not be assumed to follow chronologically from Revelation 19's battle but may recapitulate the same inter-advent period.
First Resurrection	The term in Revelation 20:5–6 ("This is the first resurrection") used to describe the experience of those who "came to life" in verse 4 and who will reign with Christ for a thousand years. On the amillennial reading, the first resurrection is the spiritual resurrection of regeneration, the new birth by which the soul dead in trespasses and sins is made alive in Christ (John 5:24–25; Ephesians 2:5–6). On the premillennial reading, it is the bodily resurrection of the righteous dead at the beginning of the millennium.
Abyss (Abyssos)	The bottomless pit or deep, the realm of demonic confinement in Jewish apocalyptic literature and in Revelation. The abyss appears in Revelation 9:1–2 as the source of demonic locusts and in Revelation 20:1–3 as the place where Satan is bound for the thousand years. The sealing of the abyss over Satan communicates the security and completeness of the binding for its stated purpose: preventing his deception of the nations during the inter-advent period.
Gog and Magog	The archetypical enemies of God's people in Ezekiel 38–39, where Gog is the ruler of Magog (a northern nation), and in Revelation 20:8, where Gog and Magog represent the totality of all anti-kingdom nations gathered under the dragon's deception for the final assault on the camp of the saints. Not to be identified with specific modern nations or geopolitical entities; they are the apocalyptic symbol of all eschatological opposition to the kingdom, drawn from the Old Testament prophetic tradition.
Eshēmanen (Signified)	Greek aorist active indicative of sēmainein (to signify, to communicate through signs), used in Revelation 1:1: "He sent and communicated it (eshēmanen) by His angel to His bond-servant John." The word establishes the genre of Revelation as symbolic communication, a book that communicates its realities through signs and symbols, not through straightforward literal

	description of future events. Fundamental to the hermeneutical framework within which Revelation 20 must be read.
Lake of Fire	The final and permanent place of judgment described in Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14–15; and 21:8: the ultimate destination of the beast and false prophet (19:20), the devil (20:10), death and Hades (20:14), and all whose names are not found in the book of life (20:15). The second death (Revelation 20:14; 21:8). The eternal counterpart of the lake of fire's punishment is the eternal reign of the saints and the eternal life of those whose names are in the book of life, described with the same phrase "forever and ever" (eis tous aionas ton aionon).
Interadvent Period	The period between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ, from the resurrection and ascension to the *parousia*. On the amillennial reading, this is the period represented by the millennium of Revelation 20 and the present age of every other New Testament eschatological passage. It is the age of the kingdom's inauguration and advance, characterized by the already/not yet tension, the binding of Satan in the specific sense of Revelation 20:3, and the reigning of the saints with Christ in the present heaven.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that Revelation 20:1–10 is a genuine, inspired, authoritative portion of the Word of God, and that its correct interpretation matters for the church's eschatological self-understanding. The temptation, in the face of the complexity and controversy surrounding this passage, is to avoid it altogether, to relegate it to the category of "too difficult to settle" and to move on to less contested terrain. This lesson rejects that temptation. The passage can be read carefully, contextually, and exegetically, and the result of such reading is, on the evidence presented here, the amillennial interpretation. The church that understands Revelation 20 correctly is the church that understands the present age correctly, that understands itself as living in the millennium, with Satan bound in the specific sense of verse 3, with the reigning dead in Christ surrounding it as the great cloud of witnesses, and with the consummation approaching at the return of the King.

We must believe that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1–3 is not a future event but a present reality, accomplished in principle at the first coming of Christ and operative throughout the inter-advent age. This conviction has immediate practical significance: the church that is engaged in cross-cultural mission is not attempting to advance the gospel against an unbound adversary who has full and unrestrained power to prevent the nations from hearing. It is plundering a house whose strong man has already been bound. The mission advances not against Satan's full power but against his restricted, already-defeated, short-time-remaining fury. That is not complacency; it is confidence grounded in Christ's accomplished victory.

We must believe that the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4–6 is the spiritual resurrection of the new birth, and that every believer who has been regenerated has already participated in the first resurrection. The second death, eternal condemnation, has no power over those who have been raised with Christ through the new birth, because they are united to the One who has already absorbed the second death's condemnation on their behalf. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1) is the present-tense version of the eschatological promise of Revelation 20:6: "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power."

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

We should feel the specific confidence that comes from understanding the present age as the age of the bound strong man. The church is not in a state of eschatological siege, waiting for a future binding of Satan before the gospel can truly advance. The binding has occurred. The plundering is in progress. The nations are being reached. The elect are being gathered. The great multitude is being filled out. Every act of faithful gospel proclamation, every conversion, every disciple made, every church planted in a previously unreached community is an act of plundering the strong man's house, the exercise of the authority that belongs to the community of the already-bound kingdom. That is the emotional and spiritual posture the amillennial reading of Revelation 20 is designed to produce: not triumphalism, but confident, gospel-energized mission in the awareness that the battle's outcome is already decided.

We should also feel a deepened solidarity with the reigning dead in Christ. The souls on the thrones of Revelation 20:4 are our brothers and sisters, the cloud of witnesses of Hebrews 12:1, the present heaven's community of intercessors and worshippers who surround us as we run the race of the inter-advent age. They are not passive

observers; they are the priestly community who offer the prayers of the saints as incense before the throne. The living church and the reigning dead are one body, separated by death but united in Christ, both serving the same King in the same inter-advent age, and both moving toward the same consummation.

We should desire above all to have a part in the first resurrection, to be among those of whom Revelation 20:6 pronounces the beatitude: "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power." The desire for genuine regeneration, for the first resurrection that is not merely a doctrinal category but a living, transforming, eschatological reality in one's own soul, is the most fundamental of all eschatological desires. The person who has been raised with Christ through the new birth has already passed from death to life, is already beyond the reach of the second death's condemnation, and is already seated with Christ in the heavenly places. This is the eschatological security that no power on earth or under the earth can remove.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Revelation 20:1–10 slowly and carefully in its entirety. Then read it again in light of the five New Testament binding texts examined in this lesson: Matthew 12:29, John 12:31, Luke 10:18, Hebrews 2:14–15, and Colossians 2:15. For each binding text, identify the specific connection it makes between the first coming of Christ and the restriction of Satan's power. Write a brief synthesis: how do these five texts together support the amillennial reading of Revelation 20:1–3? And where do you find the argument most compelling, and where do you have remaining questions?
- Read John 5:24–29 carefully, noting the two types of "caming to life" that Jesus describes: the present spiritual resurrection of those who hear His word and believe (vv. 24–25) and the future bodily resurrection of all in the tombs (vv. 28–29). How does this passage establish the Johannine precedent for the amillennial reading of Revelation 20:4–6? Write a brief explanation of how you would use John 5:24–29 in a conversation with a premillennial friend who insists that the first resurrection of Revelation 20 must refer to a bodily resurrection.
- Read Ephesians 2:5–6 and reflect on what it means that you have already been "raised up" and "seated with Christ in the heavenly places." If this is your present eschatological status, already raised with Christ, already enthroned in the heavenly places, what difference does it make for the way you approach the discouragements, fears, and apparent defeats of the inter-advent age? Write a brief reflection on the gap between your theological knowledge of this status and your experiential appropriation of it, and identify one specific way you could close that gap this week.
- If you have come from a premillennial background and have found the amillennial arguments in this lesson challenging or unsettling, take time this week to do three things: (1) write down the specific premillennial arguments you find most compelling; (2) identify which of those arguments the lesson has or has not addressed to your satisfaction; (3) bring those unresolved questions to the next class session. The goal is not to win a debate but to pursue the most exegetically faithful reading of the passage together. Honest questions are a sign of serious engagement, and they are welcome.
- Memorize Revelation 20:6 this week: "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; 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." Carry it as the eschatological beatitude of the regenerate, the present-tense declaration of the security, the priestly identity, and the reigning vocation that belong to every person who has been raised with Christ through the new birth.

Key Texts: *Revelation 20:1–10; 19:11–21; Revelation 1:1–3; Matthew 12:29; John 12:31; Luke 10:18; Ephesians 1:20–23; Romans 8:1*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before this lesson, what was your understanding of the millennium, the thousand years of Revelation 20? Where did that understanding come from (church tradition, popular eschatological literature, prior study, or careful personal exegesis)? After engaging this lesson's exegetical arguments, where do you find yourself most persuaded, most uncertain, or most in need of further investigation?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Revelation 20:1–3. What three actions does the angel perform with respect to Satan (v. 2–3a)? What is the stated purpose of the binding (v. 3b)? What is the duration (v. 3)? What happens at the end of the duration (v. 3c)? What specific activity of Satan is being restricted, and how does the precision of verse 3b ("so that he would not deceive the nations any longer") bear on the scope of the binding?
- Read Revelation 20:4–6. Who are described as sitting on the thrones? What two categories of people are described as having "came to life" in verse 4? What does verse 5a say about "the rest of the dead"? What does verse 5b call "the first resurrection"? What beatitude does verse 6 pronounce on those who share the first resurrection, and what eschatological security does it provide? What priestly and royal vocation does verse 6 assign?
- Read Matthew 12:22–29 and John 12:27–31. How does Jesus in Matthew 12:29 describe the relationship between the binding of the strong man and the plundering of his house? What is the connection He draws between His own exorcistic ministry and this binding? In John 12:31, what specific event does Jesus say will cast out the ruler of this world, and when does He say this will happen ("now", in relation to what event)?
- Read John 5:24–29. What does Jesus say about those who hear His word and believe in verses 24–25, specifically, what does He say has already happened to them and what "hour is coming and now is" for "the dead"? Then what does He say in verses 28–29 about the "hour that is coming" when "all who are in the tombs will hear His voice"? What is the difference between the two "hours", and what does that difference establish about the relationship between spiritual and bodily resurrection in John's theology?
- Read Revelation 20:7–10. What does Satan do when he is released (v. 8)? What do Gog and Magog represent in the context of Revelation's symbolic world (cf. Ezekiel 38–39)? What happens to the assembled forces (v. 9)? What is the final disposition of the devil (v. 10), and how does the phrase "forever and ever" applied to his torment compare to its use for Christ's eternal reign in Revelation 11:15?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the recapitulatory structure of Revelation means that Revelation 20's millennium need not be assumed to follow chronologically from Revelation 19's battle. Do you find this argument persuasive? What is the strongest counter-argument from those who insist on a chronological reading? And what specific features of Revelation's structure would need to be established to settle this question definitively?
- The lesson argues that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1–3 is specifically targeted at restricting his ability to "deceive the nations," and that this specific binding is the eschatological reality that makes the worldwide gospel advance possible. Does this interpretation satisfyingly account for the apparent intensity of satanic activity in the present age (cf. 1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:11–12)? How would you explain to

someone the difference between the specific binding of Revelation 20:3 and the general ongoing activity of Satan in the inter-advent age?

- The premillennial reading of Revelation 20:5 ("The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed") insists that this verse requires a temporal gap of a thousand years between the resurrection of the righteous and the resurrection of the wicked. The amillennial response draws on the Johannine precedent of two different meanings for "came to life". How do you evaluate this exchange? Which reading do you find most exegetically defensible, and what additional evidence would help you decide?
- The lesson argues that the one thousand years of Revelation 20 is a symbolic number, the number of completeness and vastness applied to the inter-advent period, rather than a literal ten centuries. What is the strongest hermeneutical argument for and against this reading? If the number is symbolic, how do we determine where symbolic reading is appropriate and where it shades into allegorizing that evacuates the text of genuine historical and temporal content?
- The lesson closes by arguing that Revelation 20, read within the New Testament's consistent two-age framework and with the amillennial identifications of the binding and the first resurrection, does not require a third stage (millennium) between the *parousia* and the eternal state. How do you assess this argument? What would it take for you to be fully persuaded? And if you are already persuaded, what are the most significant implications of that conviction for your eschatological framework?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the amillennial reading of Revelation 20:1–3 should produce a confident, mission-energized posture in the church, the awareness that the strong man is bound and the nations are available for the plundering of the gospel. Does the congregation you serve or attend exhibit this kind of eschatological confidence in its approach to mission? What would change in your congregation's missionary engagement if it genuinely believed that Satan's ability to prevent the gospel's worldwide advance has been specifically restricted by the risen Christ?
- The lesson describes the beatitude of Revelation 20:6, "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power", as the present-tense declaration of the eschatological security belonging to every regenerate person. How does this declaration relate to the experience of assurance of salvation? What would it mean for a believer struggling with assurance to genuinely receive the eschatological security that the first resurrection provides?
- As this unit turns in the next lessons to the premillennial and postmillennial positions and then to the question of Israel in biblical prophecy, what is the one unresolved question from this lesson you are carrying forward? Name it specifically. And commit to engaging the subsequent lessons with that question in hand, watching to see whether the broader canonical and theological evidence strengthens or complicates the amillennial case you have examined here.

Prayer Focus

Open this prayer time by reading Matthew 12:29 aloud: “Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.” Pause. This is Jesus’ own description of what He came to do, and of what He has already done. The strong man has been bound. His house is open for plundering. The nations are not sealed off from the gospel by an adversary who has full and unrestricted power to prevent their hearing. The kingdom is advancing, the nations are being reached, and the plundering is in progress. Pray that this theological conviction would be genuinely transformative for the congregation’s approach to mission, not a slogan to be repeated but a living eschatological confidence that actually changes how the community of faith engages with the world it is called to reach.

Pray for the congregation’s engagement with the difficulty of Revelation 20, for those who find the amillennial arguments in this lesson challenging because they have been formed by a different tradition, for those who find the premillennial arguments more compelling despite this lesson’s case, and for those who are genuinely uncertain. Pray that the disagreement over Revelation 20 would not become a source of division or bitterness but would be held within the framework of charitable, text-focused, gospel-united dialogue that the best of the Reformed tradition models. Pray for the humility to hold convictions with intellectual rigor and interpersonal gentleness at the same time, persuaded but not arrogant, certain but not contemptuous.

Pray for those in the congregation who need the specific assurance of Revelation 20:6, “blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power.” There are people who have genuinely been regenerated, who have been raised with Christ through the new birth, who have passed from death to life, whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life, and who nevertheless live under a cloud of eschatological anxiety, uncertain of their standing before God, haunted by the prospect of the second death. Bring the beatitude of Revelation 20:6 to them in prayer. The second death has no power over those who have part in the first resurrection. That is not a conditional promise; it is the eschatological declaration of the One who holds the keys of death and Hades and who has already absorbed the condemnation that the second death represents.

Pray for the worldwide mission of the church in the awareness that the binding of Revelation 20:3 makes possible. Pray for the specific unreached people groups for whom no indigenous gospel witness yet exists, for the missionaries who are engaged in the most difficult and most resistant fields, for the church planters who are establishing beachheads in communities that have never before had a gospel-preaching congregation. Pray Matthew 12:29 over each of them: the strong man of this community has been bound by the risen Christ. The house is open for plundering. Go in and carry off His property, because it was His to begin with, and because the One who bound the strong man is the One who sends you.

Close by reading Revelation 20:4–6 together, slowly, as a congregational declaration of solidarity with the reigning dead in Christ: “They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years… Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; 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.” Let the congregation hear the names of those they have buried in faith, not aloud, but in the silence of their own hearts, and let them receive the truth: they are alive. They are reigning. They are priests. They are with Christ. And the second death has no power over them. And neither does it have power over you, if you have part in the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part. Amen.

> *"Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."*
>
> **Matthew 12:29, NASB 1995**

Key Texts: *Revelation 20:1–10; 19:11–21; Revelation 1:1–3; Matthew 12:29; John 12:31; Luke 10:18; Ephesians 1:20–23; Romans 8:1*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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