

Eschatology – Discussion about Revelation 20  
Fairfield Christian Reformed Church  
May 10, 2020



John Piper  
Debate Moderator<sup>1</sup>

Jim Hamilton  
Premillennial

Doug Wilson  
Postmillennial

Sam Storms  
Amillennial

### The Three Historically held Positions

- Premillennial → Christ returns prior to his thousand-year reign on earth
  - o Hippolytus, Lewis Chafer, John Walvoord, D. Moody, John MacArthur, Thomas Schreiner
- Postmillennial → Christ returns after the symbolic thousand-year reign, which occurs through Christ's kingdom expansion on earth
  - o Charles Finney, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Charles Hodge, B Warfield, NT Wright
- Amillennial → Christ returns after the symbolic thousand-year reign, which occurs in heaven, not on earth
  - o Augustine, John Calvin, Anthony Hoekema, Louis Berkhof, GC Berkhouwer

### Case Study<sup>2</sup>

The book had all the makings of a bestseller. Adventure, drama, action, mystery, even a touch of horror; it was all there. Paul finished reading the final few pages, put the book down, and reflected on the author's dramatized account of the events recorded in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. The author had a gift for bringing the biblical ideas to life.

Kelly, a friend from church, had recommended the book to Paul. She had told him the book was not only an excellent read—it had changed her life. With a new understanding of the way in which the end-times would unravel, Kelly again felt excited to be a Christian. She had explained to him how the book had enabled her to figure out the mysterious symbolism of Revelation. With this understanding, she was now able to see that the end-times scenario was unfolding right before her eyes.

Paul had to admit the book had held his attention from cover to cover. And he too felt a new urgency regarding the end-times. He was especially intrigued by the author's view that Christ would soon come and take Christians out of the world, wage war against his enemies, and then embark on a thousand-year period, which he called the millennium—the period when Christ and his church would rule the world.

Just then, the phone rang. It was Bob, a close friend of Paul's and a member of his Bible study group. The timing was perfect. Bob had majored in biblical studies in college and loved to discuss theological subjects. Paul explained the basic story line of the book and then asked Bob what he thought.

<sup>1</sup> "An Evening in Eschatology." Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis, MN, Sept. 27, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd, Gregory and Paul Eddy, "Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology." Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.

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Bob hesitated before finally saying, “Actually Paul, I’ve looked through that book. I’ll agree that it seems to be an exciting book. But to be honest, I think the author’s interpretation of the book of Revelation is way off base, and I’m worried about its impact on people. The author treats the book of Revelation as though it is a snapshot of the future when in fact it is intended to be symbolic. The apostle John wasn’t writing about events that were going to take place in the lives of the people he was writing to. He tells us this at the very beginning of the book. I’m afraid Christians will read this book and waste time trying to interpret current events though this book the same way some people use horoscopes.”

After their conversation, Paul was left with many questions. How should Christians interpret the book of Revelation? Literally or symbolically? Does it speak about events in the first century or about events in the twenty-first century? And what about this idea of the millennium? Will Christ return soon and set up a thousand-year reign on the earth?

**Revelation 20:1-10 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. <sup>2</sup>And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, <sup>3</sup>and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. <sup>4</sup>Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup>The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup>Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. <sup>7</sup>And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup>and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. <sup>9</sup>And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, <sup>10</sup>and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

**Discussion Questions**

- Returning to our case study from a couple of weeks ago, should Christians interpret the book of Revelation literally or symbolically?
- Do you see “Satan’s activity totally shut down” in vs.1-3 like Hamilton sees it or do you see the shutting of Satan’s activity specifically in regards to deceiving the nations like Storms sees it?
- The Greek word *anastasis* “resurrection” always refers to a physical resurrection. Why should we interpret Rev. 20:6 differently from this consistent usage?
- Storms suggests Rev. 19 and 20 are separate parallel accounts of the same span of time (the church age aka the millennial kingdom). Read Revelation 19. Do you see these two chapters as parallel accounts or as sequential accounts?