In God’s Kingdom, Evil will be Removed

Revelation 20:7-15

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Natural Divisions** | * Revelation 20:7-10 At the appointed time, Satan will be released; he will lead the nations in rebellion against God; fire from God will destroy the armies in an instant; and the devil will be thrown into the lake of fire.
* Revelation 20:11-13 From the heavenly great white throne, Jesus will judge on the basis of their works those who have died apart from Christ, and all of the unsaved will be condemned, and earth and sky will be destroyed.
* Revelation 20:14-15 Those who have not received salvation by faith in Christ will be thrown into the lake of fire, and death and Hades will also be purged from God’s universe.
 |
| **Summary Sentence** | At the appointed time, Satan will lead unsaved, mortal humans in rebellion against God and His people, but fire from God will destroy the rebellion along with the created earth, and the wicked dead will be condemned on the basis of their works before the great white throne in heaven. |
| **Central Idea** |  When Jesus returns, evil will be removed |

Over spring break, I watched the British television series called *Downton Abbey*. It’s a historical drama set in England in the years 1914-1920, and it relates the lives of a fictional aristocratic family and the household servants in a large country home in North Yorkshire. Among the characters there are people you admire, there are people you are fond of, and there are people you would like to strangle on sight. Some of the characters in that drama are evil, through and through.

There is one character, a footman named Thomas, and would best be described by the words of Genesis 6:5, which says, *“that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”* Thomas the footman is a despicable character. He needs to be removed. He needs to be taken out of the drama. Nothing good will ever come from his presence there.

There’s a point in the drama where Thomas finds himself in desperate need of a job, and so, after behaving badly for years, he begins to behave better in order to be retained in his old job. He behaves responsibly and diligently and respectfully, and so they hire him back. But his heart hasn’t changed. He’s still an evil man, and you know that nothing good will ever come from his presence in that household.

*Downton Abbey* is a fictional drama, but evil is an ongoing reality of life, and we are pleased to know that one day God will remove all evil. The Bible teaches that God is building His Kingdom, and that God’s future Kingdom—God’s household—will be cleansed of evil. We learn from our passage today that after Jesus returns, Jesus will raise the dead and He will judge the wicked. **When Jesus returns, evil will be removed**.

Open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 20.

In our study of chapter 19 we saw the glorious return of Christ at the end of this age. We saw that in that day the nations will be gathered in opposition to God and to God’s people, but Jesus will appear from heaven, and Jesus will *speak* destruction on His enemies. Just as God *spoke* the world into existence—just as on the day of creation, God *spoke* and there was light; even so, on this future day, Jesus will *speak*, and His enemies will be destroyed.

Last week we studied the first six verses of chapter 20, and we considered the fact that throughout the course of church history, scholars have differed on how they have interpreted the thousand-year reign of Christ described in the first six verses of chapter 20. We considered the fact that down through the centuries, there have been (and still are) several reasonable, valid opposing views of how this thousand-year reign of Christ is to be understood.

There are among us several different views of how the book of Revelation is to be interpreted, and whatever view you have, I urge you to treat with respect those who hold a different view.

Whatever view you’ve been taught about the events we expect to occur at the end of the age, be aware that there are many Christian scholars who hold a different view.

Whatever interpretation you’ve embraced, be aware that there are many Christians who are just as committed to the inerrancy of Scripture as you are, who’ve held a different interpretation.

We will not all agree about how we understand Biblical prophecy, but we ought not let our views on the book of Revelation to be a cause of division among us. There are several valid, evangelical, God-honoring approaches to interpreting this book.

Last week we looked at page 185 of your CBS spiral notebook to see a graphical representation of four common views of the timeline of the course of the church age. These views differ, but we considered last week that all of these views are in agreement on certain key elements.

*All* of these views affirm that one day Jesus will return in bodily form. *All* of these views affirm that one day Jesus will raise the dead; He will judge the wicked, and He will establish His eternal kingdom. There’s a new world coming. The ultimate Kingdom of God is an *eternal* Kingdom on a *new* earth, and all of these views agree that it is this *eternal* kingdom that is our future hope.

Last week I gave you a brief overview of the Premillennial Dispensational view of this thousand-year reign of Christ described in chapter 20, and I also gave you a brief overview of the Amillennial view.

Today I’m going to walk you through a timeline of each of these views, and my purpose is that you would take away just a broad understanding of two orthodox, evangelical views of what God has revealed about how He is building His future eternal kingdom.

These timelines are going to be on the class website, which is [austinnorth.cbsclass.org](http://www.austinnorth.cbsclass.org) and also, your Core Group Leaders will email them to you. So you don’t need to worry about taking notes and copying down what you see on the overhead. Feel to just listen, so that you can get a feel for different ways of understanding God’s process of building His eternal kingdom. And remember, there are many other views than just these two.

First we will look at a Premillennial Dispensational timeline.

In the Old Testament we find woven throughout its teaching the promise of a coming eternal Kingdom of God. The Old Testament prophets had revealed that God’s purpose in history was to establish the eternal Kingdom of God.

With the provision of the New Testament, we find that the Kingdom of God is being established in stages. We see a *progressive* coming of the promised Kingdom. And so, the first stage of the Kingdom is the coming of the King. The first event we will include on this timeline is the birth of Jesus. pThe first stage of the Kingdom has come because the King has come. Jesus has arrived as the promised son of David, the promised King over the Kingdom of God.

The next major event on our timeline is Christ’s death on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, His death paid the penalty for the sins of mankind. Jesus’ death made it possible for man to be fully reconciled to God. Salvation has been accomplished.

Jesus was raised from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and since then we have the second stage of the Kingdom of God, the church age. Jesus is reigning from heaven.

During this second stage of the Kingdom, Jesus reigns from heaven, and the church is His representative body on earth. During the church age, there are both believers and non-believers on the earth. The godly and the ungodly co-exist on earth during this second stage of the Kingdom.

According to this Premillennial Dispensational view, there will come a time when the church—the collective body of believers—will be suddenly taken off of the earth. Christians will be will be caught up from the earth and taken to be with Jesus in the heavenlies. This event is called the *rapture*, and we haven’t talked about it in our study of Revelation, because the rapture isn’t explicitly taught in Revelation. Biblical support for the rapture is found in the book of 1 Thessalonians, and even among premillennialists there are differences of opinion about when that event may occur.

According to the premillennial view, at the Rapture, all believers are taken from the earth, and unbelievers are left behind. Christians who are taken in the Rapture receive their immortal, glorified bodies at this time. Christians who have died before the Rapture will receive their glorified bodies as well. This event, the Rapture, is considered to be the first stage of the “first resurrection.”

The next significant event on our Premillennial Dispensational timeline is a short time of intense worldwide suffering which is called *“the Great Tribulation.”* The Great Tribulation is the set of cataclysmic judgment events that occurs just prior to the second coming of Christ. According to the Premillennial Dispensational view, all of the events in Revelation 6-18 are understood to be a part of the Great Tribulation.

The duration of the Great Tribulation is seven years, based on an interpretation of the book of Daniel. Because the Rapture has removed Christians from the earth, the world is populated during the Great Tribulation primarily by non-believers. However, there are some believers on earth during the Tribulation, because chapter 7 speaks of 144,000 Jewish believers who are sealed for protection during this time.

At the end of this age there is the second coming of Christ. We saw that in chapter 19. The nations will be gathered in opposition to the people of God, but Jesus will return in glory to instantly destroy His enemies. Jesus will return accompanied by New Testament believers—by Christians from the church age—who were given glorified bodies in the Rapture, and who have been in heaven with Jesus for the last seven years.

According to this view, immediately after Jesus returns, there will be another resurrection event. This is the resurrection event spoken of in Revelation chapter 20, verse 4. Old Testament people of faith (all of the faithful from before the time of Christ) and believers who died on earth during the Tribulation will be resurrected when Jesus returns, and they will be given their glorified, immortal bodies. This final group of glorified believers is said to be the second stage of the “first resurrection.”

There will also be judgment at this time. According to the Premillennial Dispensational view, at the time of Christ’s return, all of the Jews—all of ethnic Israel—will be gathered together for judgment. Those who’ve rejected Christ will be condemned; those ethnic Jews who have come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation will be given an inheritance in the land of Israel.

All of the wicked who survive Christ’s coming will be sent to Hades—to the realm if the dead—to await the Great White Throne Judgment that will take place at the end of the thousand-year reign of Christ.

The next stage of the Kingdom of God is the Millennium—the thousand-year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20. This is the third stage of the Kingdom of God; it is not the final stage. According to the Premillennial view, after Jesus returns in victory and removes the ungodly from the earth, Satan will be bound and removed, and Satan will have no influence at all in the world for 1000 years. Jesus will reign over this earth from Jerusalem for a thousand years. All believers—all of the people of faith—from all ages will populate this third stage of the Kingdom of God, and they will reign with Christ.

All people of faith who have died or have been raptured will enter the Millennial Kingdom in glorified, sinless, immortal bodies. But there will also be mortals in the Millennium. These would be those who became believers during the Tribulation, and they survived the Tribulation to enter the Millennium in mortal bodies. These mortal believers will live and marry and reproduce and fill the earth and die during the Millennial Kingdom.

Although there will be only Christians on earth at the beginning of the Millennium, there will be mortal believers who will give birth to families, some of the offspring of these families will not be believers. During the thousand-year reign of Christ, there will be many generations that will live and die. Over the course of the thousand-year time span there will come to be a large population of non-believers.

At the end of the thousand-year Millennium, Satan will be released from the Abyss, and he will again gather the nations in rebellion against God. The nations will gather for battle, but fire will come down from heaven and devour them all. The earth will be destroyed in an instant, and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire.

After this is the final judgment—the judgment described in our passage today. All the wicked dead will be raised and judged according to their works, and all will be found guilty. The wicked will be cast into the lake of fire.

After the final judgment, there will be the fourth and final stage of the Kingdom of God. There will be a new recreated earth, and God will live there with His people for all eternity. This is not the Millennial Kingdom; this is the eternal Kingdom. This Kingdom is not on this earth; this final Kingdom is on the new earth. This is the fullness of the Kingdom of God. This is the Kingdom that we will enjoy forever.

Now let’s look at the amillennial timeline. This timeline will go much faster because it is very much simpler. This view, the amillennial view, is the view that you have heard taught in my lectures this year.

The amillennial timeline starts out exactly the same way.

The first stage of the promised Kingdom of God begins with the birth of Jesus. The first stage of the Kingdom of God begins with the arrival of the promised King.

There is also agreement between these two views regarding the *timing* of the *second* stage of the Kingdom of God. Both views understand that Christ’s ascension is the beginning of the second stage of the Kingdom of God because during the church age, Jesus now reigns from heaven. Both views agree that it is the church—the collection of all believers on earth—that constitutes the citizens of the Kingdom of God. This second stage of the Kingdom lasts from Christ’s first coming until His second coming.

Although these two views agree about the character of the second stage of the Kingdom, the two views disagree about the nature and the extent of Christ’s victory over Satan at the cross. The two views differ in their understanding of what it means for Satan to be bound.

Whereas the Premillennial view considers the binding of Satan to be a total removal of his influence from the world. The Amillennial view considers the binding of Satan to be a restraining of Satan’s ability to deceive the nations. According to the Amillennial view, Satan was bound at the cross, and as a result of that restraint, the gospel has been proclaimed and received in every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Satan is bound and the gospel is spreading throughout the earth.

Both views agree that during this second stage of the Kingdom, the people of God still struggle with sin. Furthermore, the people of God are interspersed with people who have rejected the authority of God. During the church age, Christians live among a society of non-Christians. There is an abundance of sin in the world. And Jesus has said that in this world, there will be tribulation. There will be suffering.

According to the Amillennial view, the church age is characterized by ongoing suffering, and recurring judgments against sin. Christians live in a world that experiences waves of suffering, like birth pangs—the times of suffering become intense, and then they relent; they grow intense, and then they relent.

I have lived my entire life in a country and during a time when there is hardly any suffering at all. But my life span is not at all typical of what believers have experienced during the course of the church age. The Amillennial view is that suffering is characteristic of life in a fallen world, and that the book of Revelation was given to comfort Christians who are experiencing the suffering that is typical during this second stage of the Kingdom of God. Revelation was given to comfort Christians who are experiencing suffering during the course of the church age.

According to the Amillennial view, the next event is the release of Satan, the rebellion of the nations, and the outpouring of God’s wrath. This event is called *The Day of the Lord*.

We’ve seen in Revelation 19 that as the armies of rebellion gather in opposition to God, Christ returns in power and glory. This is the end of the church age. As Jesus returns, believers will be given immortal, glorified bodies, and they will be caught up to meet the Lord and they will join our Lord in His victorious return. The rebel forces will be destroyed in an instant with a word of judgment, and the earth will be destroyed at this same time.

Immediately after Christ’s return, Jesus will raise the dead, judge the wicked, and establish His eternal Kingdom. This will be the final and ultimate stage of the Kingdom of God. There will be a new recreated earth, and we will live forever enjoying the presence and the blessing of God. This is the fullness of the Kingdom of God. This is the Kingdom we will enjoy forever.

Next week we’ll be looking in more detail at this glorious future Kingdom, but our passage today doesn’t focus on the eternal state; our passage today describes the judgment of the wicked. **When God brings His Kingdom, evil will be removed**.

Look at verses 7-10 of Revelation chapter 20. *“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth--Gog and Magog--to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”*

What we have here is a future time when Satan will be permitted to deceive those whose hearts are hard toward God and to gather them in focused opposition against God’s people. The nations will gather, but this rebellion will be defeated in an instant. Fire will come from heaven—judgment will come to devour all of those who stand in opposition to God. **When God brings His Kingdom, evil will be removed**.

Scholars differ about whether this rebellion is the same event described in Revelation 19, or whether it is another rebellion occurring at the end of the Millennium, but everyone agrees that God’s people are not harmed by this rebellion. The armies of the wicked are destroyed in an instant.

The final vision of our passage is John’s vision of the judgment of all of the unsaved. When a believer dies, he goes to be with our Lord. When an unbeliever dies, he goes to a place that is called the realm of the dead—a place known as Hades. The unbeliever remains in the realm of the dead until the day of judgment—the day described in verses 11-15.

Look with me at Revelation 20:11-12. *“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”*

For fallen man, the only answer to the problem of sin is Christ’s death on the cross. The only payment that cancels the debt of sin is the sacrifice Jesus made at the cross. For those who have trusted in Christ’s death for their salvation, they find that their names have been written in the book of life. Those who have trusted in Christ will not suffer judgment; their names are written in the book of life.

For those who have refused to obey the gospel, the alternative is a just and true consideration of their works on the day of Judgment, before the great white throne of God.

People today live their lives with a false complacency, believing that judgment will not be a problem. They believe that somehow the scales will be set so that their good deeds are on one side; their bad deeds on another. On that basis, most people mistakenly think that their good deeds will outweigh the bad, and they will sneak in under the wire and be admitted into the kingdom of God.

That’s not how it works. You see, on one side of the scale is the perfect righteousness that God requires—the perfect life of obedience and faithfulness that only Jesus accomplished. The standard on this scale is perfection. No one measures up. A single sin tips the scale toward condemnation and rejection. All of us have sinned and fall short of God’s glorious standard. There is no one who is righteous, not even one.

But if you’ve placed your faith in Christ, your name is in the book of life. Your deeds will never be placed on that scale. As a believer, you are connected with Jesus by faith, and your destiny is the same as His. You are connected with Jesus, and your destiny is to be with Him forever in His eternal kingdom. It’s an eternal connection.

For those who are not connected with Christ, their deeds *will* be placed on that scale, and their deeds will condemn them. There is a day of judgment that is coming, and in that day, **all evil will be removed**.

**When God brings His Kingdom, evil will be removed.** It brings us joy to know that God’s Kingdom will come, but it brings us grief to know that many will be lost. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and neither should we. I hope that as we consider the reality of final judgment, it will spur us on to pray for those we love. I hope that it will spur us on to be ambassadors of Christ with grace and kindness. Our God is able to change the heart, to open the eyes of the blind, and we pray for His amazing grace in the lives of the lost. Let’s close in prayer.