

GNG'S INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION

Some have asked about Good News Gathering's position on the second coming of Christ and the Millennium referred to in Revelation. This paper has been developed for the following purposes:

1. To inform those both within and without GNG of the common interpretations
2. To eliminate needless disagreements within GNG regarding these interpretations

Reviewing The Three Most Common Interpretations

Much speculation has emerged over John's reference to the binding of Satan and the reign of Christ for "a thousand years." Rev. 20:2-4, 6. The word Millennium is not found in the Bible. Millennium is a Latin word for 1,000 years. The three interpretations (Pre, Post, A-Millennial) differ in two distinct ways:

- a. Whether Christ will return before (Pre-Millennial) or after (Post-Millennial) the Millennium.
- b. Whether the Millennium is to be interpreted literally (Pre and Post) or figuratively (A-Millennial).

Prior to discussing these interpretations, it is important to note that no other passage in the Old or New Testament mentions this thousand-year period. A chart reviewing the Pre, Post, and A-Millennial interpretations is found on page 10.

PRE-MILLENNIAL

1. The Interpretation

The prefix "pre" means before. Thus, Christ's second coming will precede the Millennium. The order of events is as follows:

- a. Christ will come in secret and will raise the dead saints and living believers into heaven in what is commonly called "the rapture."
- b. The rapture will be followed by a seven-year period of intense suffering during which the Antichrist will rule the earth. This period is called "the great tribulation."
- c. At the end of the seven-year tribulation, Christ will come a third time. He will appear from heaven openly (not secretly), Armageddon will be fought and Christ will destroy the Antichrist and the forces of evil.
- d. Christ will reign for 1,000 years in Jerusalem. Many Jews will be converted, the Jewish state will be re-established, and the temple and sacrificial worship will be restored. Wolves and

lambs will feed together and man's life will be lengthened. During this Millennium, Satan is bound in the Abyss.

- e. At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan will be released from the Abyss and will stir up rebellion against God. His defeat will be followed by the resurrection of the wicked and the final judgment. Thus, Pre-Millennialism interprets this passage as describing a literal 1,000 year period.

2. Pre-Millennialists

- a. Many in the early church were Pre-Millennialists. Papias (c. AD 130), Justin Martyr (c. AD 140), Irenaeus (c. AD 180), and Tertullian (c. AD 220), all held some form of Pre-Millenarianism. This interpretation may reflect the heavy Jewish influence upon the early Church as evidenced by its emphasis on an earthly Messianic reign in Jerusalem and the restoration of the temple and sacrificial worship.
- b. Pre-Millennialism enjoyed a revival in the 20th Century. The popular "Left Behind" books and movies present a pre-millennial viewpoint.

3. Common Objections to Pre-Millennialism

Though many early Christians were Pre-Millennialists, many were not, e.g. Eusebius (AD 260-339), Origen (c. AD 223) and Jerome (AD 343-420). However, many believe that St. Augustine (AD 354-430) effectively refuted Pre-Millennialism in his book, The City of God, by interpreting Rev. 20 figuratively rather than literally. The common objections are as follows:

- a. Rev. 20 does not indicate a secret rapture of both the dead saints and living believers. Only the souls of some martyrs are resurrected. See Rev. 20:4.
- b. Rev. 20:4 does not state that this will be a bodily resurrection but refers only to "the souls of those who had been beheaded."
- c. Rev 20 does not state that the dead saints and Christ will reign "on earth." No mention is made in Rev. 20 of the Jews, the Jewish state, the temple or sacrificial worship.
- d. The Bible does not support the idea of multiple comings of Christ and multiple resurrections. See John 5:28-29; John 6:39,40,44,54; John 11:24; John 12:48; II Thessalonians 1:6-10.
- e. Christ consistently rejected the idea of an earthly kingdom. See John 6:10-15; John 18:33-36.
- f. The Old Testament refers to a period of universal peace and righteousness. See Isaiah 2:2-4. These references may not support the idea of a literal millennium. They may refer to the peace and righteousness that will exist in heaven. See Isaiah 65:17-25 which refers to "new heavens and a new earth."

POST-MILLENNIAL

1. The Interpretation

The prefix “post” means after. Thus, Christ’s second coming will follow the Millennium. The order of events is as follows:

- a. The Gospel will gradually permeate the world so that Christianity will prevail upon the earth.
- b. At the close of this period in which the Gospel spreads throughout the earth, there will be a 1,000 year period of universal peace. The Jew will be converted and Satan will be bound during this Millennium.
- c. At the end of the Millennium there will be an outbreak of wickedness and a final, world-wide conflict between the forces of evil led by Satan and the forces of good, led by Christ.
- d. At Christ’s second coming, Satan and the forces of evil will be defeated, all of the dead will be resurrected, and the final judgment will then occur.

Thus, Post-Millennialism interprets this passage as describing a literal 1,000 year period. It differs from Pre-Millennialism in that Christ’s second coming occurs after, rather than before, the Millennium.

2. Post-Millennialists

This view may owe some of its force to the Enlightenment’s belief in the gradual progress of man toward perfection. It gained in popularity prior to World War I. However, the twentieth century and its two world wars have lent it no factual support. It is believed that Alexander Campbell held to this view. Shades of Post-Millennialism can also be seen in the Roman Catholic theologian, Teilhard de Chardin’s book, The Divine Milieu (1957):

“The kingdom of God is within us. When Christ appears in the clouds He will simply be manifesting a metamorphosis that has been slowly accomplished under His influence in the heart of the mass of mankind.”

3. Common Objections To Post-Millennialism

- a. Jesus indicated that only a few people would believe at the time of His second coming. Luke 18:8.
- b. Jesus did not predict a world-wide conversion before His second coming nor a period of universal peace. Rather, He taught that the wheat and tares would grow together until the end of the world and that there would always be wars and rumors of wars. Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Matthew 24:6.
- c. Jesus did not picture all ten of the virgins being prepared to meet Him at His coming. Matthew 25:1-13. Instead of a universal conversion, at Christ’s second coming “all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him.” Rev. 1:7.

- d. It seems odd that after 1,000 years of peace and righteousness Satan will be able to lead an evil army as numerous as “the sand on the seashore.” Rev. 20:8. Where will they come from if righteousness prevails in a converted world?

A-MILLENNIAL

1. The Interpretation

The prefix “A” is a negative, i.e. it means in short, “No.” Therefore A- Millennialism holds that there is no millennium either before or after Christ’s second coming. The order of events is as follows:

- a. The statement in Rev. 20:3 that Satan is bound for a thousand years is now being fulfilled. “Bound” means that Satan’s efforts are limited, but Satan is not eliminated. Therefore, good and evil will continue until Christ’s return. There will be no peace on earth nor will Christ reign on earth.
- b. The 1,000 year period is symbolic of the time between Christ’s ascension and His second coming. Satan’s power was greatly limited by Jesus when He cast out demons (Matthew 12:22-29) and when He arose from the grave. Hebrews 2:14-16; Rev. 1:18.
- c. The reference in Rev. 20:4 to the saints reigning with Christ indicates a spiritual reign in heaven which is happening now.
- d. Upon Christ’s return the end events will occur: the resurrection, final judgment, and eternal reward or damnation.

Thus, A-Millennialism interprets Rev. 20 figuratively. Unlike Post-Millennialism, A-Millennialism does not hold that the world will get progressively more righteous. Unlike Pre-Millennialism, A-Millennialism does not expect Christ to set up a literal kingdom on earth with His throne in Jerusalem.

2. A-Millennialists

- a. The most famous A-Millennialist was St. Augustine (AD 354-430). He rejected the literal interpretation of Rev. 20 concerning both:
 - 1) A literal 1,000 year reign of Christ
 - 2) That the Millennium would occur “on earth”

Common Objections to A-Millennialism

Two objections have been raised against the idea that Satan is now bound:

- a. Practical experience – daily life appears to indicate that Satan is alive, well, and hard at work.
- b. Spiritual teaching – to believe that Satan is bound seems at odds with Peter’s statement that Satan is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.
1 Peter 5:8.

GNG’S MILLENNIAL POSITION

Down through the centuries, sincere men and women of God have held each of the millennial views, or variations thereof. The proponents of these views have had much in common, for example:

- 1) Belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God
- 2) Belief that Jesus is the Son of God
- 3) Belief that Jesus died for our sins
- 4) Belief that Jesus is coming back
- 5) Belief that those outside of Christ will go to Hell, while those in Christ will go to Heaven.

With all of this common ground, we can’t understand why these few verses and the varying interpretations have produced so much division in the church. Sadly, some have attempted to turn this issue into an article of faith. This makes no sense to us. Thus, GNG does not align itself wholeheartedly with any of the three common interpretations. We believe these are matters of opinion about which liberty should reign in the church. Thus, GNG tends to be Pro-Millennial and Pan-Millennial.

1. PRO-MILLENNIAL*

The prefix “pro” means “for” or “in favor of”. GNG is Pro-Millennial because we’re all for it, if and when it ever comes.

2. PAN-MILLENNIAL*

The prefix “pan” means “to turn out” or “to result”. We’re Pan-Millennial because we figure that if a person believes, repents, confesses, is baptized for the remission of his/her sins, and leads a Christ-like life it will all pan out in the end anyway.

* We wish to thank two practical men of God for these tongue-in-cheek Millennial views: Larry Stewart, former Pastor of the Hillsboro First Baptist Church, for the Pro-Millennial view, and the late J.H. Lyle for the Pan-Millennial view.

SOME CERTAINTIES ABOUT THE SECOND COMING

Though some of the details are uncertain, there are several things about the end that we can know for sure:

1. Christ is Coming Back

Scripture leaves no doubt that Christ will return.

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|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. Matthew 16:27 | j. I Timothy 6:13-15 |
| b. Mark 14:60-62 | k. Titus 2:12-13 |
| c. John 14:1-3 | l. James 5:7 |
| d. Acts 1:11 | m. I Peter 1:13 |
| e. I Corinthians 15:20-23 | n. II Peter 3:10-13 |
| f. Philippians 3:20-21 | o. I John 2:28 |
| g. Colossians 3:4 | p. Jude 14-15 |
| h. I Thessalonians 4:16-17 | q. Revelation 1:7 |
| i. II Thessalonians 1:6-7 | r. Revelation 22:7,12 |

2. Christ's Return Will Be Personal

- a. Christ will return in person
- b. I Thessalonians 4:16 – “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven.”

3. Christ's Return Will Be Visible

- a. Just as the first coming in Bethlehem, Christ's second coming will be literal and visible.
- b. Matthew 24:30-31 – “...they shall see the Son of Man coming”
- c. Acts 1:11 – His second coming will be as visible as His ascension.

4. Christ's Return Will Be Glorious And Triumphant

Contrasting images of Christ (First/Second Coming)

- a. Humiliation v. Glory
Hebrews 9:28
- b. Servant v. Every Knee Shall Bow
Philippians 2:5-11
- c. Rejected, Killed v. Glory and Angels
Luke 9:22-26
- d. Child v. King of Kings
Rev. 12:5, 19:11-16

5. Christ's Return Will Be Sudden And Unexpected

- a. Scripture repeatedly warns that Christ's return will be unexpected:
 - 1) I Thessalonians 5:2-3 – "... as a thief ..."
 - 2) Matthew 24:27 – "... as the lightning ..."
 - 3) Luke 12:40 – "... the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him."
- b. Ever since Christ walked the earth, people have wanted to know when He will return. The Apostles asked Christ when He would return. Matthew 24:3; Acts 1:6. Other believers asked the Apostles when Christ would return. I Thessalonians 5:1-2. Apparently, some Thessalonian believers wondered if Christ had already returned. II Thessalonians 2:1-2.
- c. Nevertheless, Christ taught that the date and time of His return is not for us to know. Matthew 24:36,42,44; Acts 1:7. He compared the ignorance about the time of His second coming with the ignorance in Noah's time about the flood. The people in that day did not know the end was near "until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man." Matthew 24:37-39.
- d. Jesus further states that He did not know the time of His return. Matthew 24:36.
- e. Jesus warned us about the so called "signs" that the end is near.
 - 1) Don't connect the second coming with other earthly events as if the two have to coincide. The Apostles apparently thought the return of Jesus and the destruction of the temple would coincide (Matthew 24:1-3), but they were wrong.
 - 2) Don't believe reports about the second coming. Ignore those who claim to be the returned Messiah. Matthew 24:4-6.
 - 3) Don't allow catastrophes or tragedies to make you think the second coming has to follow immediately. See Matthew 24:6-8. (The beginning of birth pains doesn't tell us exactly when the baby will come; it only tells us that He will come.)
 - 4) Beware false prophets who perform great signs. Matthew 24:23-25.
- f. So, how will we know when Christ is coming? We will know Christ is coming **when we see Him**. Luke 21:26-28.

SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE ABOUT THE SECOND COMING: BE READY!!!

1. Don't think the second coming is so far off that it can be ignored. Our inability to know the exact date and time should not make us careless. Matthew 24:45-51. Jesus warned against thinking that we have plenty of time to get our lives in order. The parable of the ten virgins illustrates this. Matthew 25:1-13.
2. Matthew 24:42 – “Keep watch”
3. I Thessalonians 5:6 – “...be alert....”
4. II Peter 3:11 – “Live righteously”
5. Rev. 3:3 – “...wake up....”
6. Rev. 16:15 – “...stay awake....”

CONCLUSION

It seems that frequently Christians get so absorbed in trying to figure out:

- a. Who the Beast is
- b. When and where the Battle of Armageddon will be fought
- c. Whether there will be a literal Millennium on earth
- d. Whether Christ will return before or after the Millennium
- e. When the End will occur

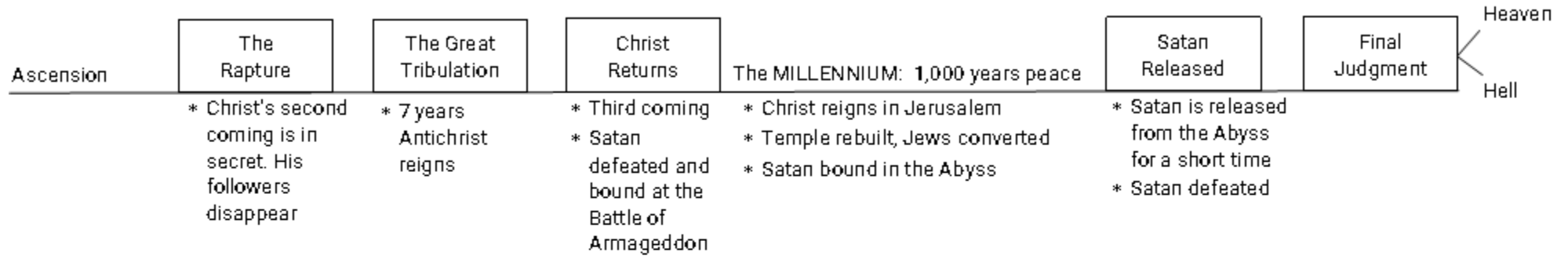
that we forget Revelation's main point – **WE WIN!** Regardless of who he is, **THE BEAST CANNOT DEFEAT US**. No matter when or where the Battle of Armageddon is fought, **CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH WILL PREVAIL**. Whether the Millennium is literal or figurative, earthly or heavenly, **WE WILL REIGN WITH CHRIST**. Regardless of when He returns, one thing is sure – **CHRIST WILL RETURN**. No matter when it occurs, be it today or a thousand years from today, **THE END WILL COME**. The forces of evil will be vanquished and the redeemed will live in everlasting glory.

Our attitude in the meantime should be one of readiness. We must live our lives in such a way that we are prepared to meet the Lord at any time. One day while John Wesley, the famous eighteenth century evangelist, was hoeing his garden a friend asked him, “John, what would you do if you knew for certain that Jesus would return today?” “I'd go right on hoeing my garden,” replied Wesley. His life was in order. He had done what Christ called him to do. He was ready to go. Are you?

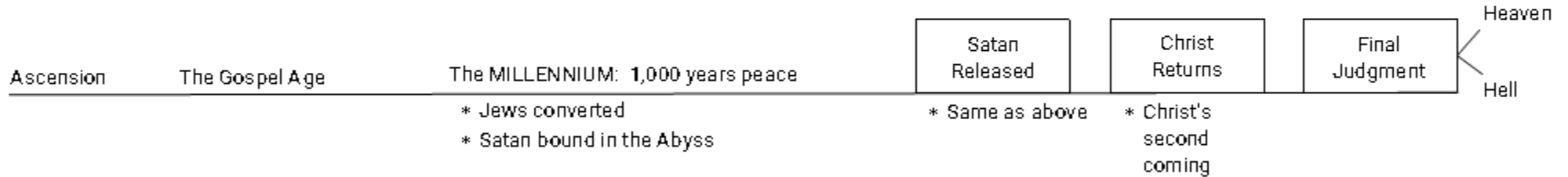
This material has been adapted for use by GNG from The Regular Guy's Guide To Revelation by Jeff Lyle.

THREE MILLENNIAL INTERPRETATIONS

PRE-MILLENNIAL



POST-MILLENNIAL



A-MILLENNIAL

