

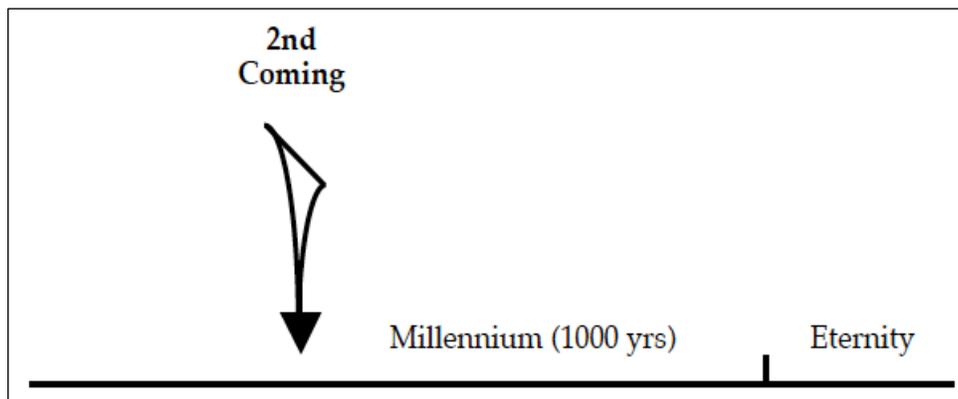
Views on the Millennium in Revelation 20

Revelation 20 contains the (in)famous millennial text, which is certainly the most debated passage in the book, and maybe even one of the most debated texts in all of Scripture. From the start, then, we should approach this passage with humility, as there has never been uniformity in opinion on this topic throughout all of church history, and we should not let differing views stir division among us or cause us to abandon fellowship with other believers.

Again, many views exist on this passage, but they can be boiled down to three main camps. I will offer a brief sketch of them here:¹

1. Premillennialism (“Pre-mil”)

This is probably the most popular view in American churches today. It holds that Christ will return to earth *before* (“pre”) the millennium and will reign for 1,000 years on earth. This reign takes place on the present, unredeemed earth, and the 1,000 years intervenes between the second coming and the final arrival of the new heavens and earth. Most who hold to this view believe the millennium will last for a literal 1,000 years, but such a view is not necessary to the position.



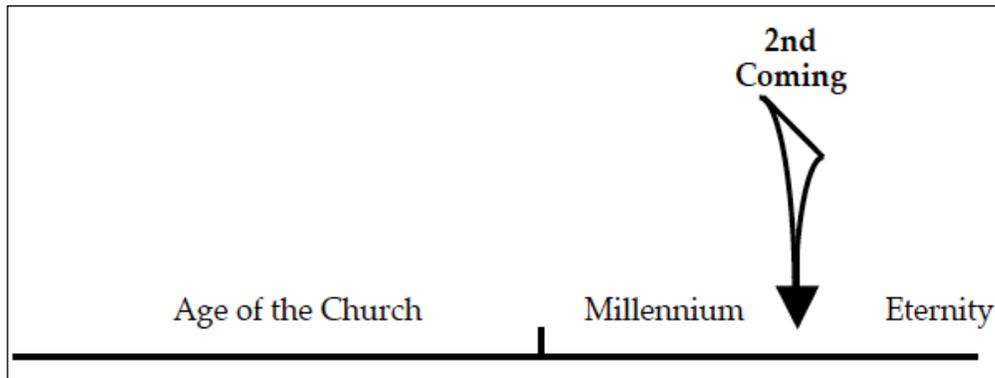
Within the pre-millennial camp there are two separate camps, dependent on one’s view of the rapture and of texts like 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Historic premillennialists hold to what is called the “Post-Tribulation” position, arguing that the “rapture” will happen at the second coming, following a period of tribulation (which the Church is present for). At the end of the tribulation, the righteous who have died will be resurrected and believers who are still alive will be changed. This has been the “historic” view for those holding to premillennialism, and was really the only premillennial view up until the beginning of the 19th century.

Dispensational premillennialists, on the other hand, believe that there will be a secret rapture seven years before Jesus returns to inaugurate the millennium. This is the “Pre-Tribulation” view of the rapture, which holds that the Church will not go through the great tribulation, but will be caught up to Christ before he returns. Dispensationalists also emphasize the fulfillment of promises to the Jewish people during the millennium, and many hold to a mass conversion of ethnic Jews.

¹ The following summaries are adapted from Tom Schreiner’s section on this text in his commentary: “Revelation” in *ESV Expository Commentary: Hebrews-Revelation*, vol. 12, ed. Iain M. Duguid, *et al.* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018): 723-24, and from the class notes of Dr. Karl Kutz of Multnomah University: *Revelation Notes* (BIB 112), Spring 2017. All charts are from these course notes, and are used with permission.

2. Postmillennialism (“Post-mil”)

This view holds that Christ will return *after* (“post”) a long period of blessing on earth; Christ will come *after* the millennium. The millennium will come about during the Church age, and the 1,000 years are not literal but signify a long period of time in which the gospel progressively spreads and the world is transformed. This period closes with the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgement, and the arrival of the new heavens and earth. This view has been a minority view throughout history and is quite uncommon today.



3. Amillennialism (“Amil”)

Literally, this word means “no millennium,” but such a label is not the best descriptor of this position. A better one is “realized” or “inaugurated” millennialism. In this view, the 1,000 years symbolically represent a long period of time; the number is not literal. Amillennialists argue that the millennium began with the resurrection of Christ and will last until the second coming. During this period, deceased believers will reign spiritually with Jesus in heaven (in the intermediate state) as they await their future physical resurrection and the renewal of all things. During this time, Satan is bound in the sense that he was “bound” by the cross, and is unable to stop the spread of the gospel to the world and unable to deceive the nations to gather together for war against God. At the end of the millennium, Christ will return once and for all; Satan will be defeated, the last judgement will come, and eternity will be ushered in. This view has become more popular today, and has been consistently held throughout Church history.

