The Millennia of Revelation 20

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Bible Versions
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Acknowledgment
For the millennial view presented here I am indebted to Kurt Simmons.
See: https://preteristcentral.com.

Revelation 20:1-8

Satan Bound

1 *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven. He had the key to the Abyss and a great chain in his hand.*
2 *He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and <u>bound him for a thousand years</u>.*
3 *He threw him into the Abyss, shut it and sealed it above him, so that he should no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years are ended. After that, he must be released for a short time.*

The Saints' Reign

4 *Then I saw thrones, and people seated on them who were given authority to judge.*
And I saw <u>the souls of those who had been beheaded</u> for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God.
They had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.
5 *(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.)*
This is the first resurrection.
6 *Blessed and holy is the one participating in the first resurrection! Over these 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.*

Satan's Defeat

7 *When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison.*
8 *He will go out to deceive the nations …*

Three starting points for our interpretation:

1. All of John's visions in Revelation relate to first-century events (Rev 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10).
2. There appear to be not one, but <u>two distinct millennia</u> in Revelation 20:
   Verses 1-3: The internment of Satan for 1000 years.
   Verses 4-6: The reign of the martyrs, also lasting 1000 years.
3. The Abyss (traditionally, the "bottomless pit") is where evil spirits are interned pending their final judgment (Lk 8:31; 2Pet 2:4).

The Souls of the Martyrs

John saw the "souls of those who have been beheaded" (Rev 20:4).
This ought to make us recall an earlier incident where John similarly saw "souls".

Revelation 6:9-11:

> [9] *And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw beneath the altar <u>the souls of those who had been slain</u> because of the word of God and for the testimony they had maintained.*
> [10] *And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you avenge our blood and judge those who dwell upon the earth?"*
> [11] *Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to rest a little while longer, until the full number of their fellow servants and brothers, who are about to be killed as they had been, should be complete.*

The martyrs here are said to be beneath the altar, because that was the place where the blood of the sacrificial victims was poured out (Ex 29:12; Lev 4:7; 8:15).
They represent the Old Testament martyrs (Abel → Zechariah, Mt 23:35), along with the victims of the Church's first persecution (Stephen et. al., Ac 8:1-3; Rev 12:11-16).
They are in the intermediate abode: Paradise.
They call out for God to avenge their blood and judge their persecutors.
The persecutors dwell "on the earth" — probably the Land of Israel. The Jewish leadership was responsible for their deaths.
But they are told to rest a little longer; they must wait until all their fellow martyrs have been killed as well (6:11). Only then will their persecutors be judged (Rev 18:24; cf. Mt 23:34-38).

What John sees in **Revelation 20:4-6** is the fulfillment of all this.
The "souls" now include the martyrs of the second persecution — those "beheaded" under Nero.
The implied promise for John's first-century readers facing imminent persecution is that those remaining faithful unto death will live and reign with Christ (cf. Rev 2:10; 2Tim 2:12).
They will come to life in a "first resurrection" (20:5b), and reign with him in Paradise.[1]
These, like the earlier martyrs, are called "souls" because they are in the intermediate abode (Hades-Paradise) awaiting final embodiment via the second resurrection shown later in the chapter (Rev 20:11-15).

[1] The latter group of martyrs soon to be killed under Nero receive the following promise (Revelation 14:13, ESV):
"… Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

What about the Thousand Years?

As aforementioned, there appear to be not one, but <u>two distinct millennia</u> in Revelation 20:
Verses 1-3: The internment of Satan in the Abyss for 1000 years.
Verses 4-6: The reign of the martyrs, also lasting 1000 years.

What is the source of John's millennial imagery?
One possibility is Psalm 90:4: the fact that God dwells above and outside of time.
The imagery might then point to the "other-worldly" locations of Satan's internment and of the martyrs' reign.
The following might reinforce this:
The Christians in Asia to whom John wrote were likely familiar with the Greco-Roman notion:
That **the dead dwell in Hades for 1000 years prior to being reborn (reincarnated) to earthly life**.[2]

If indeed one or the other (or both) of these are John's sources, the millennia would serve merely as CODES for Hades and the afterlife. They would point John's readers to the "other-worldly" locations of Satan's internment and of the martyrs' reign — the Abyss and Hades-Paradise, respectively.
Satan is "dead", and so are the martyrs, and both are awaiting their release/resurrection:
Satan will be "released from his prison" (20:7). He will go forth to deceive and incite persecution (20:8).
The martyrs and other saints will finally be raised from Hades-Paradise in the General Resurrection, as shown in Revelation 20:11-15. They will be rewarded with admittance into God's presence in heaven.

The two millennia of Revelation 20:1-6 are successive, not overlapping.
Indeed, the second millennium is a direct consequence of the cessation of the first.
Satan is "dead" in the Abyss for 1000 years.
Upon his release/resurrection he goes out to deceive and incite persecution.
This leads to the saints being "beheaded" — a Roman form of execution.
These martyrs are well and truly dead. Yet they come to life again:
As "souls" they reign with Christ for 1000 years (20:4).
They have experienced a "first resurrection" (20:5b) and now dwell in Hades-Paradise.

Note that all those participating in this first resurrection are exempt from "the second death" (20:6).
But the "rest of the dead" (20:5a) — presumably the wicked dead — only "live" again once the martyrs' 1000-year reign in Paradise is finished and the final Judgment takes place.
Then they rise merely to undergo a "second death" in the lake of fire — their final abode (Rev 20:14-15).

Of course, if this view is correct, and the 1000 years is merely a code rather than a lengthy time period, it totally undercuts the various (contradictory) millennial views prevalent today.

[2] Some might object that John would never allude to such a pagan notion, and that we should look solely to the Old Testament for the source of his imagery. Yet elsewhere John does seem to interact with Greek thought — most notably in the concept of the *logos* in the prologue to his gospel (Jn 1:1ff.). And despite its pagan connotations, the term "Hades" is itself utilized in both the Septuagint scriptures that John's readers used and by John himself in Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14.
Concerning the source of John's imagery, see Kurt Simmons, *Revelation's Millennia and Greco-Roman Notions of Hades*.
Via: https://preteristcentral.com/Revelation's%20Millennia%20and%20Greco-Roman%20Notions%20of%20Hades.html.

Satan's internment and release

Satan is the one ultimately responsible for the saints' persecution.
When John saw and wrote, ca. 64 AD, Satan was about to reignite persecution (Rev 2:10).
He would do so via the Beast, who stands for the Roman inquisition under Nero.
Satan will be able to do this upon his release from the Abyss.

Of considerable help to our interpretation is the following fact:
What happens to Satan is almost exactly replicated in the experience of the Beast.
Revelation 17:8:

> *"The beast that you saw once was, and now is not, and is about to rise from the Abyss and go to its destruction. And those dwelling on the earth — whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world — will be astonished when they see the beast that once was, and now is not, and yet will be."*

The Beast, representing official persecution, was not then in operation.
He had (in some form) existed earlier, but when John saw and wrote, he was "dead" in the Abyss.
Yet he would soon rise again, and persecution would be renewed.
And the Church's enemies will marvel and rejoice at its return.[3]

So, what should we make these internments of Satan and of the Beast?

In answer, we need to note that there were two distinct periods of severe persecution in the 1st century.
Both are depicted in Revelation:
Revelation 12:6, 11-16: The first persecution was that of the Jewish mother-church following Stephen's martyrdom. This persecution ceased with the conversion of Saul/Paul, ca. 35 AD.
Revelation 13: The second persecution was that about to commence under Nero, AD 64.

The internments of Satan and the Beast are one and the same.
They correspond with a period of relative peace for the Church.
This began soon after Paul's conversion (cf. Ac 9:31) and continued for nearly 30 years.
During this interval, Christians were relatively free to practice and propagate their faith.
Reading through Acts, from chapter 13 on we see Paul and his helpers traveling and openly proclaiming the gospel. From chapter 17 on we see the Roman authorities protecting Paul and his companions in the face of (mainly Jewish) opposition.
This civil protection afforded to Paul and others allowed for the free propagation of the gospel, with the result that a considerable part of the Roman world heard the message (Ac 19:10; Col 1:6; Mt 24:14).
Satan's internment relates to this civil protection, and his release corresponds with its cessation during the latter years of Nero's reign.[4]

[3] Revelation 17:8: The beast "is about to rise from the Abyss …" The fulfillment of Revelation's prophecies was imminent.
[4] Paul, ca. 52 AD, wrote about Nero (the "man of lawlessness") being restrained by some thing or person (2Thes 2:6-7).
Paul was likely referring to the incumbent emperor, Claudius, whose sudden death just 2 to 3 years later (in October 54) cleared the way for Nero's accession. Nero's rule came to an inglorious end when the Roman Senate in June 64 declared him to be a public enemy.

In Revelation, the renewal of persecution under Nero is depicted in terms of:

- The Beast's ascent (release) from the Abyss (Rev 11:7; 17:8).
- The Beast's mortal wound being healed (Rev 13:3).
- Satan's release from the Abyss (Rev 20:7).

Three ways of portraying the same thing!
Satan acts through the Beast to persecute the Church.
When persecution begins anew, it is as if both Satan and the Beast have been resurrected from the Abyss.
With Nero's persecution, what had earlier "died" suddenly came to life again.
And the Church's enemies were enthralled with its return (Rev 17:8).

Nero's persecution broke out around November 64 AD, and probably continued until his suicide in June 68.
A period of about 3½ years or 42 months, as noted in Revelation 13:5.

Note that whereas the first persecution of Jewish believers was localized (Ac 8:1), the second persecution is Empire-wide: Satan goes out to deceive the nations to gather them against the Church (Rev 20:8-9).

Conclusion

The 1000-year imagery of Revelation 20 is a code for (and pointer to) Hades and the afterlife.
The two millennia are successive, not overlapping.
Only after the first 1000-year period ends with Satan's release can the martyrs perish and the second 1000-year period begin. Therefore, the second millennium (the martyrs' reign in Hades-Paradise) is a direct consequence of the cessation of the first.

Here is a schematic representation of these millennia:
Satan bound → his 1000-year internment in the Abyss
→ Satan's release → Nero's persecution
→ martyrs beheaded → their 1000-year reign in Paradise (= 1st resurrection)
→ martyrs' release (= 2nd resurrection) → final judgment and heavenly reward.

Appendix 1: The Intermediate State

Prior to AD 70, those who died entered an intermediate abode called Sheol or Hades.
They went there to await final resurrection and judgment.

Sheol/Hades consisted of at least two separate compartments:
The saints entered **Paradise** — a place of bliss.
The wicked entered a separate section of Hades — a place of punishment.

- Jesus and the repentant thief entered Hades-Paradise (Lk 23:43; Ac 2:31[5]).
- The patriarchs were "alive" in Paradise (Lk 20:37-38).
- Enoch and Moses went to Paradise (Heb 11:5, 24-28; cf. 11:39-40); presumably so did Elijah.
- Lazarus (in the parable) went to "Abraham's side" (Lk 16:22), aka Paradise.
  Conversely, the rich man went to "Hades" — the section reserved for the wicked (Lk 16:23).
- Paul was "caught up" into Paradise and/or the third heaven (2Cor 12:1-4).
- John, in Revelation 6:9-11, saw the "souls" of Old Testament and early Christian martyrs.
  They were in Paradise as disembodied spirits, awaiting their final embodiment (cf. Mt 10:28).
  They are "beneath the altar", crying out for justice but being told to "rest a little while longer" (6:11).
- John in Revelation 20:4-6 saw another group of "souls".
  These were the martyrs about to be "beheaded" under Nero.
  They would come to life in a "first resurrection" (20:5b), and reign with Christ in Paradise.[6]
  In Hades-Paradise, both groups of martyrs were awaiting the final Judgment and the second (and final) Resurrection depicted in Revelation 20:11-15.
- Demons and fallen angels were held in Tartarus (aka the Abyss) pending their final judgment (2Pet 2:4; cf. Lk 8:31; Rev 20:1-3). Tartarus is probably a separate (third) section of Hades.
  Peter's point (in 2 Peter 2:4) is that the false teachers will suffer a similar fate (2:9b).

Today, when we die, we don't enter any intermediate abode.
Instead, judgment takes place immediately, followed by entry into our final reward: heaven or the lake of fire.
Believers are now able to enter heaven directly because the Resurrection is a past event.
Direct access to God, in this life and the next, is our great privilege under the New Covenant.
See Hebrews 11:39-40.[7]

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[5] Acts 2:31, Peter's Pentecost sermon: *"Seeing this in advance, David spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ: That his soul was not left in Hades, nor did his flesh see decay."*

[6] The latter group of martyrs soon to be beheaded under Nero receive the following promise (Revelation 14:13, ESV):
"… Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

[7] Paul in several places anticipates this post-70 AD privilege of direct entry into heaven:

- "We [first-century Christians] will not all [have to] sleep [in Paradise], …" (1Cor 15:51).
- "After that [time], we who are alive and remain will be caught up [into the spiritual realm] …" (1Thes 4:17).
- The new "norm" is for believers to be clothed with their new heavenly bodies the moment they die (2Cor 5:1-10).

Appendix 2: Multiple Deaths and Resurrections in Revelation 20

Revelation 20 refers to a "first resurrection" (20:5b) and a "second death" (20:6).
Logic demands there must also be a second resurrection and a first death!
The following is an attempt to understand this confusing chapter, and the interrelationships between these various deaths and resurrections:

Revelation 20	**Believers**	**Unbelievers**
1st Death (implied)	Physical	Physical
1st Resurrection, pre-AD 70 (20:4-6)	"Souls" in Hades-Paradise; "1000-year" reign	N/A (20:5a: "The rest of the dead did not come to life …")
Keys (implied by Rev 1:18)	Inmates of Hades-Paradise	Inmates of Hades-Hell (Lk 16:23)
2nd Resurrection, AD 70 (20:11-15)	Paradise unlocked; Final Judgment	Hell unlocked; Final Judgment
2nd Death (20:6, 14)	N/A (20:6)	Lake of fire (20:15)
Post-70 AD (Revelation 21 – 22)	Judged at death (Heb 9:27); Immediate entry into heaven with new body	Judged at death (Heb 9:27); Immediate entry into the lake of fire

(N/A = not applicable.)

It is possible that Death and Hades in Revelation 1:18 and 20:13 correspond with the respective realms of the lost and the saved. Or they may simply be alternate names for the realm of the dead.

Concerning the 1000-year (millennial) reign of the martyrs in Paradise (Rev 20:4-6):
1000 years serves merely as a code and pointer to Hades, the realm of the dead.

Indeed, there is another, earlier 1000-year period in the preceding verses:
The internment of Satan in the Abyss (Rev 20:1-3).
These 1000-year periods (millennia) point to the "other-worldly" locations of Satan's internment and of the martyrs' reign — to Hades-Tartarus (= the Abyss) and Hades-Paradise, respectively.

For a fuller explanation see the following:

1. Kurt Simmons' online article *Why Two MIllennia?,* which can be found here: https://preteristcentral.com/Why%20Two%20Millennia.html.
2. My article on this website: *Revelation: A Preterist Interpretation*.