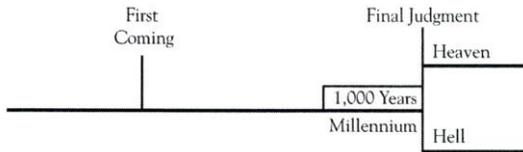


## Some False Beliefs Concerning the End Times

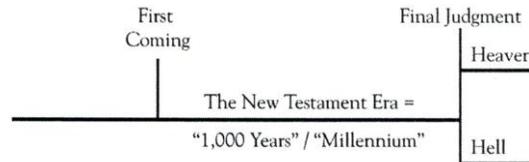
It has been said: “Wherever God builds a church, the devil sets up a chapel next door.” In other words, whenever God’s saving truth is proclaimed, the devil will follow close behind to spin false teachings that are intended to rob people of their salvation. This certainly has been true with the Bible’s teaching of the end times.

Many Christian teachers claim that there will be a semi-utopian thousand-year period of prosperity and blessing on earth immediately after the New Testament era and immediately prior to the final judgment. This thousand-year period is called the *millennium* (from the Latin language in which *mille* means “thousand” and *annus* means “year”). The following time line shows how the millennialists view the end times. Compare this with the scriptural time line below it.

### Millennialism:



### Scripture:



### The thousand years

The idea of a millennium comes from Revelation chapter 20. It is important to note that this is the only passage in the entire Bible which mentions a thousand-year period.

**Revelation 20:1-3,7-12:** I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in His hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. . . . 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. 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.

All of Scripture must be read, interpreted, and understood within the context of Scripture. The above passage, then, must be interpreted within the context of the Bible and its final book of Revelation, a book full of unusual visions and images that are not intended by God to be interpreted literally. In Revelation, God chose to communicate his truth with pictures, using figurative language.

So how should we interpret the “thousand years”? The number 1,000 is readily recognized to be a large number that can be used to signify completeness. For example, in Psalm 50:10 the psalmist Asaph said that the cattle “on a thousand hills” belong to the Lord. This does not mean that the animals on hill 1,001 don’t belong to God. Rather, “a thousand” symbolizes all of the hills, which are indefinitely many in number. So in Revelation chapter 20, when God says that Satan will be bound for “a thousand years,” we understand that Satan will be restrained for a God-ordained, complete, and indefinitely long period of time.

Because the only reference in the entire Bible to a thousand-year period is in the 20th chapter of Revelation, a book filled with symbolic visions, we interpret it in the light of the simple and clear passages found in the rest of Scripture. The interpretation that fits with the rest of Scripture is to understand the thousand years figuratively as the complete, God-ordained, and indefinitely long period of the New Testament era. **The “thousand years,” then, symbolize the full time between the first and second comings of Christ,** when Satan’s power was destroyed by Christ’s death and resurrection and Satan is “bound” in his soul-destroying activity by the power of the gospel’s proclamation. Satan will be set free for a short time at the end of the New Testament era and then quickly destroyed at Christ’s second coming.

## Postmillennialism

There are several types of millennialism and a dizzying diversity of positions on the subject. One type of millennialism is postmillennialism. Postmillennialists believe that during the New Testament *prior* to Christ's second coming there will be

- a gradual Christianization of the world
- evil will be reduced to negligible proportions
- righteousness and peace will flourish
- and material prosperity will increase.

Postmillennialists are optimists and are *socially and politically active* because they want to help bring about this golden age of heaven on earth. Therefore, (as they say) Christians today have no reason to expect trials and tribulations as they await judgment day. Rather, they will experience a gradual improvement in the world's condition. And yet, Jesus Himself said: *In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. John 16:33*

## Premillennialism

Another type of millennialism is premillennialism. The prefix *pre-* means "before." The main feature of premillennialism is the belief that the second coming of Christ will take place *before* the millennium and that the final judgment will take place after the millennium. In effect, they claim that there will be two second comings of Christ.

Premillennialists believe that when Jesus returns in His second coming to set up the millennium, He will raise the bodies of dead believers and glorify them to live with Him in the millennium. Believers who are alive at the second coming will be caught up in the air to meet the Lord and their bodies will be glorified. Then all believers will live with Him in the millennium—a golden age of prosperity, peace, and righteousness, in which Jesus will reign visibly on earth. Unbelievers who are alive at Jesus' second coming will continue to live with their natural bodies throughout the millennium. At the end of the millennium, Jesus will appear again for the final judgment and there will be a second resurrection in which the bodies of unbelievers will be raised.

**Revelation 20:4-6:** I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped 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 a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Not only do premillennialists take the "thousand years" of Revelation chapter 20 literally but they also find in this chapter their idea of a resurrection of believers prior to the millennium and the subsequent final judgment with a second resurrection. Their focus is on the words "first resurrection."

The difficult passage above, in keeping with the sound principles of proper Bible interpretation, must be understood in the light of the clear passages in the rest of Scripture that deal with the same subject matter. In the above passage, John is writing about believers who die during the so-called millennium and says that they will live and reign with Jesus during this millennium. Since, as we have learned, the "millennium" is the New Testament era, we understand John to say that believers who die during this era go to live with Jesus in heaven during that time. The term "first resurrection," then, is a fitting term that John uses to refer to the change these believers experience when they die and their souls are raised into the glorified life of heaven. The second resurrection, then, is the bodily resurrection of all the dead on judgment day. The "first death" is physical death on earth. The "second death" is the torment of hell. This explanation of the above passage is in complete harmony with the rest of the Scriptures.