

Country music star Travis Tritt spent many years playing out-of-the-way joints before he made it big in the music industry. He reports that many of the bars were dangerous places, with drunk fans starting fights over the smallest matters. But Tritt found a unique way to keep the peace in such situations. In an interview I was reading... he said:

"'Silent Night' proved to be my all-time lifesaver. Just when [bar fights] started getting out of hand, when bikers were reaching for their pool cues and rednecks were heading for the gun rack, I'd start playing 'Silent Night.' It could be the middle of July, I didn't care. Sometimes they'd even start crying, standing there watching me sweat and play Christmas carols."

Christmas carries the message of peace and hope – even to the strangest environments. The hardest of hearts can be softened by it.

Author and pastor, Tim Kellar writes:

Years ago, I read an ad in the New York Times that said, "The meaning of Christmas is that love will triumph and that we will be able to put together a world of unity and peace." In other words, we have the light within us, and so we are the ones who can dispel the darkness of the world. We can overcome poverty, injustice, violence, and evil. If we work together, we can create a "world of unity and peace."

Can we? One of the most thoughtful world leaders of the late 20th century was Vaclav Havel, the first president of the Czech Republic. He had a unique vantage point from which to peer deeply into both socialism and capitalism, and he was not optimistic that either would, by itself, solve the greatest human problems. He knew that science unguided by moral principles had given us the Holocaust. He concluded that neither technology nor the state nor the market alone could save us from nuclear degradation. "Pursuit of the good life will not help humanity save itself, nor is democracy alone enough," Havel said. "A turning to and seeing of ... God is needed." The human race constantly forgets, he added, that "he is not God."

This has been the theme of Revelation... the last book of the Bible... which we have been studying for the last 6 months. Man has chosen to not see and turn to God. And he will soon face God's divine wrath.... Mankind has tried to replace God with such elements as human government... man-made religion... and an economic system. ... Recently we have seen how God is going to destroy all three of these... which are called "Mystery Babylon" in the book of Revelation.

"Nothing will help humanity save itself... We can NOT (and never will) overcome poverty... injustice... violence... and evil. ... There is no possibility that if we simply work together... we can create a "world of unity and peace." - No! ... God is needed! ... And this morning we are about to see how God will impact mankind with this truth. ... The events of our study this morning... include a description of the ONLY time the earth will have total world peace... since the Garden of Eden... and we will also see what is necessary for this to occur. ... This is a very forceful passage... with many implications for us... but it is also a very controversial passage.

The twentieth chapter of Revelation has been the major battleground of the various basic competing systems of biblical end-time prophecy (which we call "eschatology.") ... In general, the way in which this chapter is interpreted seems to determine how the entire Book of Revelation and... to a large extent... how biblical prophecy as a whole is interpreted. ... It is in this chapter that the record appears of a thousand-year period when Satan is bound and the world is ruled in righteousness by Christ and the people of God.

The theological debate rages over the question of whether... and to what extent... this record should be taken literally. ... Is this thousand-year period exactly 1,000 years... or is the number merely a symbolic number? Is Satan literally imprisoned and powerless during this time... or is he bound only in a relative sense by the liberating power of the gospel? ... Is Christ to reign in a direct sense over the earth... on a literal throne... or is this only a figure of speech referring to the eventual conversion of the world to righteousness through the work of the Church and the preaching of the gospel?

Although there are variants within each theological position... the three major approaches to eschatology are as follows: (1) *Premillennialism*... which takes a fully literal approach to the interpretation of this passage. Premillennialism teaches that Christ's personal return to the earth in glory... will be just as it is described in our passage last week (Revelation 19)... And it will be followed by the literal binding of Satan in Hades and a literal thousand-year reign of Christ... along with His resurrected saints... here on the earth.

(2) is *Postmillennialism*... which takes a partially literal approach... teaching that there will be a literal period of Christian righteousness on the earth. ... Christ's reign... according to this teaching... will be spiritual... through His Church... which will have won the world to Him through its worldwide ministry of evangelism and teaching under His Great Commission. ... His personal return to earth will be at the end of the millennium... when the new earth is established.

(3) is *Amillennialism*... which takes a fully allegorical approach... saying this is all symbolic... and equating the Millennial Age with the Church Age. Christ's kingdom was established in a figurative sense on the earth when Satan was defeated and bound by the Lord's substitutionary death... resurrection... and ascension... and with His personal return to earth scheduled at the end of this Church Age for a general judgment.

Now... there are people who are a lot smarter than I am... who have studied Scripture longer and more deeply than I... and they hold one of the other two positions that I do not hold... So I want to be careful as I explain my position on this controversial chapter. ... And there are two points that I would like to make before we delve into it.

1. These different views about the Millennium need not cause division and controversy in the church... because each view acknowledges what is most crucial to Christianity: Christ will return... defeat Satan... and reign forever! Whatever and whenever the Millennium is... Jesus Christ will unite all believers. ... Therefore... we should not let this issue divide us.

2. As I explain the theological side of the fence that I am on... and why I've landed there... I will be seeking something far greater than scoring points against the other positions... as if to win an argument... and bring others to the same conclusion. Rather... my prayer is to lead you to a worship-filled perspective about God's justice. ... And if I can help resolve an issue that many believers and non-believers struggle with... (the issue of how a loving God can send anyone to Hell...) then our time in this passage will be well spent.

In Scripture there is more prophecy concerning the Millennium than of any other period. The Millennium was the frequent theme of the Old Testament prophets and psalmist. ... Many details about it are given to us... but not until Revelation chapter 20... do we learn that it will last 1,000 years. The Old Testament prophets and psalmist use several names... but context always reveals that it is all the same time period that is being described. Often it is referred to as “the kingdom” ... “the holy hill” ... “the mountain” ... or “the mountain of the house of the Lord.”

Before we look at Revelation 20... let me take you to a few of these Old Testament passages... so we can gain some general understandings of it.

Isaiah 2:2-4 (ESV)

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

This passage shows us that one of the characteristics of the Millennium will be – universal world peace. Differences will no longer be settled by military conflicts... but only by the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. The art of warfare will be forgotten.

Micah 4:1-5 (ESV)

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

Again we see that the entire world will be focused on Jerusalem... as its central capitol. But we also see that the Kingdom will be characterized as a time of Messianic teaching. Jesus is not allowed to be taught in schools today... but the time will come when He will be the center of all learning. Micah also adds that it will be a time of personal peace and prosperity.

Two more... although there is a vast number of other Old Testament passages. This next one might be familiar to you...

Isaiah 11:6-9 (ESV)

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Universal peace will extend even to the animal kingdom. All animals will return to how they were in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. There will be no more carnivores – animal eating other animals.

And finally...

Isaiah 65:17-25 (ESV)

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.

Millennial earth will be renovated. Jerusalem have drastic change. Also infant mortality will no longer exists. Everyone will live to at least be 100 years old. Those who do not live until the end of the Millennium – will be the rebellious ones. Death will be for unbelievers only.

Who would rebel...? Who would think that it could be better...? This period of time will be the utopia that man has sought... since being kicked out of the Garden of Eden. And wouldn't they have irrefutable evidence for

obedience... in seeing what happens when others rebelled before them?
... Death for only the rebellious would be pretty convincing – NOT to do it!

The answer to these questions reveals a significant purpose for the Millennium. We will see it as we move forward... into our passage in Revelation today.

Before utopia can be created... there are at least three important things that must first happen... and we see them in the opening verses of Revelation chapter 20...

First of all, there can be no Millennium until Satan is removed from the earthly scene. You could not have an ideal state down here as long as Satan is running loose.

In the second place, the curse of sin must be removed from the physical earth before a Millennium can be established. Scripture prophesies that the desert will blossom like a rose.

In the third place, the resurrection of the Old Testament saints must take place at the beginning of the thousand years. The Lord is not going to raise them until the Tribulation is over. Daniel makes this very clear:

Daniel 12:1-2 (ESV)

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Daniel's audience was the Jewish nation. ... This is talking about Israel. Believers will have been raptured... and are already with Christ. Following the Great Tribulation period will be the resurrection of the Old Testament saints.

Now let's read about these preliminaries from our passage in Revelation...

Revelation 20:1-3

You will notice that the thousand years are mentioned two times in verses 1-3. ... They are mentioned a total of six times in Revelation 20... It is true that the Millennium is mentioned only in this one chapter of the Bible. It is not to be found anywhere else... only here in Revelation chapter 20. (Those who hold to the positions of "postmillennialism" and "amillennialism" offer this as support for their position. ... But God mentions it six times. ... How many times does He have to say a thing before it becomes true? ... He mentions it more than He mentions some other things that people emphasize and think are important... just because they occur once or twice in Scripture. ... Six times the thousand years are mentioned... It is as though John (and the Holy Spirit) wanted us to know as emphatically and plainly as possible that Satan was to be bound, and Christ and the saints to reign on earth, for a real chronological period of a thousand years!

Postmillennialism and amillennism both declare that this part about Satan being bound... already happened in Christ's victory over him at the cross. (This is not some future event. They believe Satan has been defeated. He was bound by Christ at Calvary.) ... Well this sounds good until you think about it for a moment. It hardly squares at all with what we just read.

All throughout the more than two thousand years of Christianity... it would seem that Satan has been very active... attempting... often very successfully... to hinder and thwart the preaching of the Word and the strengthening and spiritual growth of God's people.

The two views of the Millennium that say it will not be a literal thousand years of Satan being bound... (that he is already bound by Christ) have great difficulty with 1 Peter 5:8.

1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Peter says that Satan is not bound right now. He prowls about. Peter's warning surely gives no suggestion that Satan is presently bound and powerless. Neither does the Apostle Paul in his warning in Ephesians 6:11-13... that we are to "stand against the wiles of the devil."

Another problem that the other two views about the millennium have... is to explain the last part of Revelation 20:3. Satan will "*be released for a little while.*" ... If this binding of Satan is speaking of what Christ accomplished on the cross... (and not a literal binding of Satan for a literal thousand years...) then the unleashing of Satan (in this same context) has to mean the victory of Christ at Calvary will become defeat again. Revelation 20:3 says "he must be released for a little while..." If you believe the non-literal views... this can only mean... "the victory of Christ must become defeat again..." That to me is totally unreasonable! Christ obtained complete victory!

But just as this says... at the end of (what I believe is a *literal*) millennium... Satan will be released... from a literal binding... because the people who are born during that period of time... must be tested. We will see *why* in a few minutes. (This will all make sense.)

Now let's read about the millennium... in our passage.

Revelation 20:4-6

The Millennial Kingdom will consist of three kinds of people... who will rule with Christ #1. The Old Testament saints... who we saw in Daniel 12 a few minutes ago... They will be raised after the Tribulation. #2. Believers who comprise the church who will return with Christ. We saw this as we studied last week's passage. I showed you what the Apostle Paul wrote... when he was encouraging the church at Corinth to settle their own disputes without taking each other to human courts of law...

1 Corinthians 6:2 (ESV)

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?

Do you remember the parable of the talents that Christ told...? Matthew records it for us in Matthew 25:14-20 ... I believe Matthew 25 is picture of how it will be determined who will be in charge of what... during the millennium. It is being determined right now... by how you are handling the stewardship Christ has given you as a believer. What are you doing with what He has entrusted to you?

Matthew 25:14-29

That is how it will be determined what our responsibility and authority will be in the millennium. But there will be a *third* group ruling with us. These

have invested quite a bit. The Master is well pleased with them. ... #3. Will be the persecuted saints who were martyred during the Tribulation.

Many are going to die for Christ in the Great Tribulation period... but they will live again and reign with Christ one thousand years. ... The Tribulation saints are going to trade in three and one-half years for one thousand years. ... I would say they are getting a pretty good deal. ... Those three and one-half years will be rugged and terrible... but the thousand years are going to be wonderful -- imagine living and reigning with Christ upon this earth!

Old Testament saints... the church... and tribulation saints... all make up the first resurrection. Christ went first. We will all follow Him as the first-fruit. However... there will be a period when there will be no more resurrections for 1000 years. (The first resurrection will come to an end.) But after the Millennium another resurrection will occur - the second resurrection... which we will see the purpose of... starting in verse 11.

Not only will the saints reign with Christ a thousand years, but also they will be His priests (Revelation 1:6), thus directing both the civil government and spiritual instruction for the millennial populations. Christ is High Priest, as well as King of kings, and all the resurrected saints will exercise varied religious and political functions under His supreme command throughout the millennium, in accord with the faithfulness of their service in this present life.

But who are the ones that the first resurrection will be helping Christ to rule...? Answer: Those who make it through the Tribulation and are still alive... and those who will be born to them... after the Tribulation.

But wait a minute...! If all the Old Testament saints... and all of the church (after more than 2 thousand of years)... and all the tribulation saints... will be the millennial judicial system - there will be millions of us... maybe billions... who are ruling with Christ... and so few of the earth's population (about 1/3) will make it through the tribulation. (This doesn't make much sense.)

At first we might outnumber them. But with a renewed earth that has no sickness... and longer life spans... and humans giving birth - even when they are hundreds of years old... this earth will re-populate in hardly any time at all. There will be plenty of people needing our administration.

Now we come to why the millennium must happen. Here is its reason...

Revelation 20:7-10

It is apparently for such reasons that the Devil, and presumably all his hosts, must be released for a little season. All these millennial generations, all of which are living, must also be confronted with a clearcut choice. Will they trust their great Savior and King in Jerusalem, or will they, when finally they have the opportunity, choose sin as their life-style and Satan as their god?

This will be mankind's last and greatest test. In former ages, men had used their environmental problems, such as poverty, pornography, war, intellectual pressures, and sickness as excuses for rejecting Christ. But with all these suppressed for almost a thousand years, there is no more excuse but their own sinful hearts, and these must be exposed.

The Millennium is the final testing of man under ideal conditions. This is the answer to those who say there is nothing wrong in man which circumstances and conditions cannot change. Man is an incurable, an incorrigible sinner. Even at the end of the Millennium, he is still in rebellion against God. The rebellion in the human heart and the depraved nature of man are impossible for any man to comprehend.

If you and I could see ourselves as God sees us, we could not stand ourselves. But we think we are pretty good and that we are very nice people -- do we not? The Millennium is the final testing of mankind before the beginning of the eternal state.

This rebellion following the Millennium reveals how terrible the heart of man is. Jeremiah said, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*" (Jer. 17:9). You and I do not know how vile we really are.

Gog and Magog is mentioned again (here.) It simply means that Those who chose to reject Christ will gather in the region where Russia is located. Now... we have seen Gog and Magog before. Ezekiel prophesied about a different war in Ezekiel 38-39. We know that these are two different wars because in Ezek. 39:2 we find a sixth of Gog and Magog will be spared. ... But in Rev. 20:9... none of them will be spared. The war in Ezekiel happens before the Tribulation. This one happens after the Tribulation – at the end of the Millennium.

The Millennium is necessary before God's final throne of judgment – because it allows no one an excuse. It shows that everyone who is sent to

Hell... is sent there for a very good reason. They chose it. ... They do not want God... and it is not because they were underprivileged... Being underprivileged or disadvantaged has nothing at all to do with man's choosing his own way.

The question really is not – Would a loving God send anyone to Hell? It is rather, would a loving God force anyone who does not want Him... into His heaven...? The answer is, “No, He will not.” ... So... for those who insist on doing things their own way... God will judge them on that very basis. He will judge them by their own works – and they will not like the result. God is going to open the books.

J Vernon McGee wrote...

This is the second resurrection in which the lost are raised to be given an equitable, fair, and just evaluation of their works in respect to their salvation.

A man on his deathbed said to me, "Preacher, you just don't need to talk to me about the future. I'll take my chances. I believe God is going to be just and righteous and let me present my works."

I told him, "You are right. He is just and righteous, and He will let you present your works. That is what He says He is going to do. But I have news for you: At that judgment nobody is saved, because you cannot be saved by your works. When you stand in the white light of the righteous presence of God, your little works will seem so puny that they won't amount to anything at all."

Here now is the second resurrection... for all those who were not part of the first... or alive after the Millennium. If you are a Christian... trusting in Christ for your salvation... what is described next is not about you. You are

not going to stand before this judgment. This is for those who chose to be judged by their works.

Revelation 20:11-15

There are two types of books mentioned here. One doesn't seem to have a name... but it appears to have everyone's actions written in it... so I will call it "the book of deeds." Every thought and deed (good or bad) is all there. ... Then there is another book... and it has a name given to us in Scripture. ... It is the book of life... which is first seen in Exodus 32:33. It is mentioned in two other places in the Bible (Psalm 69:28 and Revelation 3:5.) From each of these passages... we can deduce that this book contains the names of everyone who has ever been granted life... from God. Any person who has ever had a heartbeat... will have their name in that book. But... as we read these Bible verses... we see that once it becomes clear that the person rejects God and His provision for them... their name is blotted out of the book. ... Most of the names written in it will be blotted out. ... But as we read our passage in Revelation... it is clear that some won't... some names will still be in it... and these are not condemned into the Lake of Fire. Those names will not be Old Testament saints... Christians who are part of the church... or Tribulation saints. We are all part of the first resurrection. This is dealing with those of the second resurrection, here. ... So whose names will still be in the book of life... and not be blotted out...?

My belief is that these will be infants and children who die very young – before they have a fair chance to respond to God and His provision for

them. They die before their age of accountability. These will not be cast into the Eternal Lake of Fire.

God is just. His judgment is fair. He offers salvation as a free gift to anyone who places their faith in Jesus. Those who refuse His provision... will be judged by their works...

There are two ways the Bible says you can get to heaven. Plan A is to turn to God... to trust Jesus Christ when he says, "*I am the way, the truth and the life.*" He is the only perfect person Who ever lived... because He is God. He came so we could know what God is like... and for us to have a relationship with Him.

But many people don't want a relationship with God... so God gives them another option. ... Plan B is to try to earn it... without God. That's the performance plan. And to earn it... you only have to do this: Just be perfect! ... never sin... and always do what's right - for the entire time that you live.

Since none of us qualify for Plan B... Plan A is the only means we have to obtain Eternal Life with God. Plan B will result in eternal life **without** God... every time! And it also involves unthinkable punishment... for rejecting Him.

God is loving. He is fair. And He is just. Why would anyone refuse Him?