

# The Duration of the Millennium

The Expositors Seminary  
Super Seminar – April 8-9, 2016

## I. Introduction

### A. The Length of the Millennium

1. Not the Most \_\_\_\_\_ Issue in the Debate
2. Not \_\_\_\_\_ in the Old Testament
3. Designated “\_\_\_\_\_” in Isaiah 24:22
4. Designated “a Thousand Years” in Revelation 20
  - **Key Question:** Should the number “one thousand” be understood literally or symbolically?

### B. A Comparison of the Views

	Literal		Symbolic
➤ <b>Amillennialism:</b>			X
➤ <b>Premillennialism:</b>	X	or	X

### C. The Challenge for Amillennialism

- If the millennium = the present age, how can the 1,000 years of Rev 20 refer to a period of time that is nearly 2,000 years and counting?
- If the 1,000 years is *literal*, the millennium cannot be equated with the present age.
  - **Key Observation:** Both the literal and symbolic interpretations are compatible with the premillennial view of Rev 20.

## **II. The Amillennial View of the Thousand Years**

### **A. The Case for the Symbolic View**

1. Symbolism in the Book of Revelation
  
2. Symbolism in the Immediate Context
  
3. The Symbolic Use of the Number Elsewhere in Scripture

### **B. The Significance of the Symbolism**

1. The Mathematical Root of the Number
  
2. The Symbolic Significance of the Number
  - "a long era"
  - "a long period of time"
  - "an indefinitely long period of time"
  - "an age-long, but definitely limited period of time"
  - "an extensive period of time"
  - "an extended, but indefinite, period of time"
  - "an ideal period of time"
  - "an ideal epoch"
  - "a great epoch in human history"
  - "a complete period"
  - "a time of completion"
  - "absolute completeness"
  - "the complete time that God has determined"
  - "a complete period of time, the length...known only by God"
  - "the exceeding fullness of the divine action"
  - "a very long period of indeterminate length"
  - "a period of fullness"
  - "completion and perfection [in] God's redemptive plan"
  - "the designated space of time within which the triune God will completed his redemptive purpose"

### III. The Premillennial View of the Thousand Years

#### A. The Case for the Literal View

1. The Literal Use of Numbers in Revelation
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. The Literal Use of the Number Elsewhere in Scripture
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. The Use of Indefinite Temporal Expressions in Revelation
  - “for a little while longer” (6:11)
  - “a short time” (12:12)
  - “a little while” (17:10)
  - “for a short time” (20:3)

#### B. A Closer Look at the Symbolic View

##### 1. Contrasting Approaches to Identifying Symbolic Language

- Premillennial Approach: Assume the language is \_\_\_\_\_  
(unless compelled to take it symbolically)
- Amillennial Approach: Assume the language is \_\_\_\_\_  
(unless compelled to take it literally)
  
- **Either Way:** Specific \_\_\_\_\_ must be identified!

**2. Three Questions for Identifying Symbolic Language**

a. Does it possess a degree of \_\_\_\_\_ when taken literally?

➤ “Thousand Years” in Revelation 20:    Yes    No

b. Does it possess a degree of \_\_\_\_\_ when taken symbolically?

➤ “Thousand Years” in Revelation 20:    Yes    No

c. Does it fall into an established \_\_\_\_\_ of symbolic language?

➤ “Thousand Years” in Revelation 20:    Yes    No

### 3. **Amillennial Criteria for Identifying Symbolic Language**

(G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 57)

- formal linking of two words of totally different meanings so that one is compared to the other (1:20)
- use of a key descriptive term to alert the reader to the presence of a comparative relationship (1:20; 11:8)
- the impossibility of any intelligible literal interpretation (10:10)
- a statement that would be outrageously false or contradictory if taken literally (11:34)
- context that renders a literal interpretation improbable
- clear and repeated figurative use of the same word elsewhere in the Apocalypse

➤ **Key Question:**      *Do these criteria lead to a symbolic interpretation of the “thousand years”?*

## V. **Conclusion**

Session #2

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# The Duration of the Millennium

TES Super Seminar

April 8-9, 2016

Matt Waymeyer

# The Millennial Debate in Revelation 20

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## **FOUR KEY ISSUES:**

- The Duration of the Thousand Years
- The Timing of Satan's Binding
- The Nature of the First Resurrection
- The Chronology of John's Visions

# The Length of the Millennium:

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1. Not the Most Critical Issue in the Debate
2. Not Specified in the Old Testament
3. Designated “Many Days” in Isaiah 24:22
4. Designated “a Thousand Years” in Revelation 20

# The Amillennial View:

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The Thousand Years

=

“a symbolic number,  
spanning the entire church age”  
(Kim Riddlebarger)

# The Amillennial View:

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The Thousand Years

=

“not a literal period of one thousand years,  
but the entire period, perfect, complete  
and extensive, between the first and  
second comings of Christ.”

(Cornelis Venema)

# The Challenge for Amillennialism:

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If the millennium = the present age,  
how can the 1,000 years of Rev 20 refer  
to a period of time that is nearly 2,000  
years and counting?

# The Case for the Symbolic View:

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## 1. Symbolism in the Book of Revelation

## Cornelis Venema (AM)

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“A book like Revelation, with its rich symbolism and use of biblical types and figures, gives no obvious reason to take literally the term of one thousand years.”

## Robert Strimple (AM)

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“We may readily assume that the number is symbolic, for numbers are used symbolically throughout Revelation.”

## Sydney Page (AM)

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“Since symbolism is used extensively throughout the Apocalypse and numbers are used in a nonliteral sense frequently, it would be [superficial] to insist that the number ‘one thousand’ be taken literally in this context.”

# The Case for the Symbolic View:

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1. Symbolism in the Book of Revelation
2. Symbolism in the Immediate Context

## Kim Riddlebarger (AM):

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“The immediate context and the figurative nature of many words used by John, such as *chain, abyss, serpent, beast*, and so on, should remind us that numbers are also symbolic of something else.”

# The Case for the Symbolic View:

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1. Symbolism in the Book of Revelation
2. Symbolism in the Immediate Context
3. The Symbolic Use of the Number  
Elsewhere in Scripture

## Sam Storms (AM):

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“In other texts ‘one thousand’ rarely if ever is meant to be taken with [mathematical] precision. This is true whether the context is *non-temporal* ... or *temporal*. ”

## Anthony Hoekema (AM):

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“Since the number ten signifies completeness, and since a thousand is ten to the third power, we may think of the expression ‘a thousand years’ as standing for a complete period, a very long period of indeterminate length.”

## B.B. Warfield (AM):

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“The sacred number seven in combination with the equally sacred number three forms the number of holy perfection, and when this ten is cubed into a thousand [John] has said all he could say to convey to our minds the idea of absolute completeness.”

# The Case for the Literal View:

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## 1. The Literal Use of Numbers in Revelation

## Furthermore:

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Whenever a number is used with a time indicator in Revelation – such as days (1:10; 2:10, 13; 4:8; 6:17; 7:15; 8:12; 9:6, 15; 10:7; 11:3, 6, 9, 11; 12:6, 10; 14:11; 16:14; 18:8; 20:10; 21:25) or months (9:5, 10, 15; 11:2; 13:5; 22:2) – there is no clear indication that it is symbolic.

# The Case for the Literal View:

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1. The Literal Use of Numbers in Revelation
1. The Literal Use of Numbers Elsewhere in Scripture
1. The Use of Indefinite Temporal Expressions in Revelation
  - “for a little while longer” (6:11)
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# Contrasting Approaches

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- **Premillennial Approach**  
Assume the language is *literal*  
(unless compelled to take it symbolically)

## Bernard Ramm:

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“Whenever we read a book, an essay, or a poem we presume the literal sense in the document until the nature of the literature may force us to another level.... The non-literal is always a secondary meaning which presumes an already existing literal understanding of literature. This previous stratum of language is the *necessary* point of departure for the interpretation of all literature.”

## John Davis:

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“Numbers should always be taken at face value and understood as conveying a mathematical quantity unless there is either textual or contextual evidence to the contrary.”

# Contrasting Approaches

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- **Premillennial Approach**  
Assume the language is *literal*  
(unless compelled to take it symbolically)
- **Amillennial Approach**  
Assume the language is *symbolic*  
(unless compelled to take it literally)

## G.K. Beale (AM):

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“Of course, some parts [of Revelation] are not symbolic, but the essence of the book is figurative. Where there is lack of clarity about whether something is symbolic, the scales of judgment should be tilted in the direction of a nonliteral analysis.”

# Contrasting Approaches

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- **Premillennial Approach**  
Assume the language is *literal*  
(unless compelled to take it symbolically)
- **Amillennial Approach**  
Assume the language is *symbolic*  
(unless compelled to take it literally)

## George Eldon Ladd (PR):

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“The recognition of the symbolic language of the Apocalypse does not carry with it the corollary that every phrase must involve a symbol.”

### **THE POINT:**

Specific criteria must be identified!

# Identifying Symbolic Language

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## THREE QUESTIONS:

1. Does it possess a degree of absurdity when taken literally?
1. Does it possess a degree of clarity when taken symbolically?
1. Does it fall into an established category of symbolic language?

## B.B. Warfield (AM):

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“The sacred number seven in combination with the equally sacred number three forms the number of holy perfection, and when this ten is cubed into a thousand [John] has said all he could say to convey to our minds the idea of absolute completeness.”

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# Amillennial Criteria

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- formal linking of two words of totally different meanings so that one is compared to the other
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# The Millennial Debate in Revelation 20

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## **FOUR KEY ISSUES:**

- The Duration of the Thousand Years
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