

Special Study 4

The 1,000-Year Reign In Revelation 20

John L. Kachelman, Jr.

The present topic of study is of considerable interest in the religious world. The "millennium" (from the Latin words *mille* meaning one thousand; *annus* meaning years) of Revelation 20 is currently a "hot" topic. Interest in this mysterious number is not unique to our time. Debate over the millennium has ranged for centuries. Early false teachers were met and silenced by writers in 300-400 A.D. as the sensationalism of that era tried to twist the number to satisfy curiosity. The issue remained "dead" until its revival in the early 19th century. In more recent times the errors connected with the 1,000 years of Revelation 20 have been noticed in most major denominational churches (especially the Baptists and Pentecostal churches).

A difference of interpretation over the millennium in Revelation 20 has led to three classifications of belief. *The Premillennial position* contends that Christ has to come before (pre) the millennium (1,000 years) in order for His Kingdom to be established. The most common Premillennial doctrinal aspect of this position is called "Dispensational" because it divides man's history into seven common dispensations. It is this branch of Premillennialism that presents the most brazen challenge to the Bible's teaching about the Kingdom of Christ and the Lord's ministry. *The Postmillennial position* contends that the present preaching of the gospel will result in the conversion of the entire world and thus usher in a "golden age" of Christianity. This golden age will last 1,000 years after which the Lord will return and the General Judgment takes place and then eternity. *The Amillennial position* views the 1,000 years as a synonym for the Christian Age. Accordingly, the millennium began when Christianity was established and will continue until Christ's Second Coming.

Because of the popularity, and the gross error, of Dispensational Premillennialism this present study focuses upon the interpretation of the 1,000 years. The challenge presented by the Dispensational Premillennial advocate is tremendous and modern saints need to see the tragedy of following that false doctrine. The Dispensational position is based almost entirely upon the highly figurative passage of Revelation 20:1-6. They

symbols are interpreted as presenting an earthly political system where Jesus Christ is the world's King.

A brief account of the Dispensational Premillennial position regarding the 1,000 years: After a seven year Tribulation period, Christ returns to earth to establish His Kingdom. All enemies of Christ who remain alive at His coming will be rounded up and executed as war criminals. Only the faithful will remain alive to repopulate the earth during the Millennium. The faithful dead from past ages join the living faithful. The coming back to life of the faithful dead is identified as "the first resurrection." The faithful are identified as "princes" of Christ and are awarded "thrones" upon which they sit and judge for 1,000 years. The Christ, once rejected by the Jews, will be crowned "King of the Jews" and will assume His rightful reign as the Son of David. During the 1,000 years all is peaceful on earth as harmony reigns (Isaiah 11:6-9). The converted Jews constitute the ruling authority over all the world. Temple sacrifices will resume and there will be no death, except for those executed as rebels to God. After the 1,000 years Satan will try to lead a rebellion only to be destroyed by fire from heaven.

Dispensational Premillennial Contradictions

For any interpretation of a symbolic passage to be acceptable it must demonstrate harmony with other biblical texts that are not couched in symbolism. It is this point that devastates the Dispensational doctrines built upon the 1,000 years in Revelation 20. Although there are many points that illustrate the contraction of the Dispensational position, the ones listed below are among the most prominent.

First, the doctrine states that Christ is to reign upon the earth. However the Scriptures clearly teach that at the Lord's Second Coming there will be no earth existing (2 Peter 3:10). The Dispensational defender tries to evade this contradiction by stating that this present earth will be "renewed" and thus the Lord will reign upon "the NEW earth" and in "the NEW Jerusalem." Although such appears to resolve the contradiction it only amplifies it! Peter is very clear in telling us that this present earth will be "renewed," it will be "dissolved"!

Second, the Dispensational doctrine states that Christ's reign is *to begin when He comes*. However the Scriptures state that when Christ comes

again the saints will receive their resurrected bodies and “then cometh the end when He shall deliver up the Kingdom to God” (1 Corinthians 15:24). Thus, the Bible says the Kingdom will end, not begin, when the Lord returns!

Third, the Dispensational doctrine says the Christian’s “hope” is realized when the Kingdom is established in earthly Jerusalem. However the Bible states the Christian’s “hope” is not connected to an earthly city or Kingdom — it is “reserved in heaven” (1 Peter 1:4).

Fourth, The Dispensational doctrine contends that the Kingdom IS NOT yet established, but it will be established upon Christ’s return. However the Bible states that the Colossians had been translated into the Kingdom (Colossians 1:13), the Hebrews were “receiving it” (Hebrews 12:29), and that John was “in it” (Revelation 1:9). If the Dispensational doctrine of the 1,000 years is correct then John, the Colossians, and the Hebrews were all deceived! Who should we believe — the Bible or the Dispensational Premillennial doctrine?

Fifth, The Dispensational doctrine contends that Christ is not yet seated upon the “throne of David” as spoken by the Scriptures. It is contended that since Christ is not seated upon David’s Throne, the Kingdom has not been established. The Premillennial advocate makes a great distinction between “God’s Throne” (upon which they say Christ is now seated) and upon “David’s Throne” (upon which Christ is to sit during His Kingdom). If it can be demonstrated that Christ is upon “David’s Throne” now, it will be shown that He is upon the “throne” of His Millennial Kingdom. Such is a simple chore to do. David said that Solomon would sit upon “my throne,” and Solomon did (cf. 1 Kings 1:37, 47). It is important for our discussion to observe that “David’s Throne” was also called “God’s Throne” (1 Chronicles 29:23)! Hence the throne of David is the throne of God. The two do not represent two different things but the same! If Christ is seated upon God’s throne, He is also seated upon David’s throne because they are the same! Numerous texts verify that Christ ascended and sat upon “God’s Throne,” hence He ascended and sat upon “David’s Throne” (Acts 1:11; 2:29-35; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 2:12; 8:1; 10:12; etc.). Peter’s sermon verified this conclusion — Christ ascended in confirmation of God’s promise to David and in heaven Christ reigns upon David’s Throne (Acts 2:29-35). However

the Dispensational doctrine of the 1,000 years says the “throne of God” is in heaven and the “throne of David” is on earth. Where can the Dispensational doctrine find consistent Scriptural support? The Dispensational Premillennialist denies that Christ is NOW on David’s Throne — it actually dethrones our Lord!

Sixth, The Dispensational doctrine says Jesus must serve as BOTH High Priest and King while He is reigning on earth. However the Holy Scriptures say that Christ CANNOT be a High Priest while on earth because He is not from Levi’s tribe (Hebrews 7:14). Also, the Scriptures say Christ CANNOT be a King because He is a descendant of Jehoiachin (or Coniah) and God forbade any of this man’s descendants from reigning on earth (Jeremiah 22:30; Matthew 1:12). To state that Christ must reign on earth for 1,000 years is to compel Him to disobey God.

Seventh, the Dispensational doctrine says Christ must reign on earth because the 1,000 years are literal. If the 1,000 years are literal, ALL other symbols must be literal. If this is the case then those who will reign with Christ are restricted by a literal rendering of the terms in 20:4. The Dispensational doctrine will not admit this and so it “spiritualizes” some of the symbols and interprets others in a literal manner. However the choice of what is literal and what is symbolic is determined by the doctrine and not with reasoning from other texts. Such a method of interpretation is “wresting the Scriptures” to suit one’s preconceived doctrinal bias.

Eighth, the Dispensational doctrine “reads into” Revelation 20 these details that are not found in the text but are critical to the doctrine: the reign takes place on earth; the reign takes place in Jerusalem; the reign requires a physical resurrection of dead saints; the reign requires a full restoration of the Temple worship; and, the reign requires a restoration of fleshly Israel. As a careful reading is made it will soon be discovered that there is no hint of the reign taking place on earth, in Jerusalem, no physical resurrection, no Temple restoration, and no restoration of fleshly Israel. And note: Revelation 20:1-6 does not even mention the Second Coming of Christ! This text does not even refer to the Lord’s return, yet an entire doctrinal system about the Second Coming has been founded upon it!

The obvious contradictions of the Dispensational Premillennial doctrine of

the 1,000 years are too many to list. Enough has been listed to reveal the total error of such a doctrine. All sincere students of God's Holy Word need to beware of this deadly doctrine lest they are deceived by it (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 11).

A Suggested Interpretation

Revelation 20 is a highly symbolic passage detailing the victory of Christ over Satan. The "1,000 years" is symbolic of total completeness. Viewed by this interpretation the "reign" of saints with Christ is the present period of Christianity. Saints "reign" through their righteous lives (Romans 5:17, 21). They will continue to reign with Christ for 1,000 years, or until time has been completed and Christ returns to raise the dead and judge all men. After the 1,000 years are completed, all men (both good and evil) will be raised (20:5).

The exact meaning of the "1,000 years" is widely debated. It is far easier to state what the phrase is not rather than stating what it is. We definitely know it does not refer to the Dispensational Premillennial position. The number appears to refer to the complete period that John has mentioned before (Revelation 2:10; 6:11; etc.). Such seems to justify the interpretation that the 1,000 years is a number to encourage saints to persevere regardless of the trials they faced. If they knew they were reigning with Christ, even though beset with trials, and that their reign was assured, for as long as they kept their robes white, they would gain much encouragement. Thus the symbolic number shows that nothing can stymie God's purpose because it marches to its completed end!

Guy N. Woods penned a fitting conclusion: "There is no suggestion either in Revelation 20 or anywhere else in the sacred writings that our Lord will reign a thousand years, any time, any place, notwithstanding the fact that multitudes of people have *assumed* that such is ... there is *nothing*, absolutely *nothing*, said about Christ reigning a thousand years either here or anywhere else in the Bible ... The Lord's reign neither began with the 'thousand years' nor ends with it; thus, the idea of a thousand years reign of Christ, anywhere, any time, is a figment of the imagination" (*Gospel Advocate*, p. 579, October 1, 1981).