

Revelation 20: A Premillennial Analysis
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Revelation 20 is like the Plain of Megiddo. Armies of conflicting interpretations have come upon it, sent out by various theological systems. There are attacks and counterattacks. There are defeats and victories. Each side claims to be the winner and no side is willing to surrender. No end of the battle is in sight.

My analysis of this key prophetic chapter is to examine selected relevant issues that reveal the differences in interpretation and their causes.

ISSUE #1: THE NON-LITERAL APPROACH

Their identity. The main proponents of a non-literal interpretation are either amillennialists or postmillennialists.

Some amillennialists are Oswald Allis (some classify Allis as a postmil), Louis Berkhof, William Hendriksen, Anthony A. Hoekema, Abraham Kuyper, R.C.H. Lenski, Kim Riddlebarger, Cornelis P. Venema, and Gerhardus Vos.

Some postmillennialists are Jonathan Edwards, Patrick Fairbairn, A.H. Strong, Albert Barnes, Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., J. Marcellus Kik, Rousas J. Rushdoony, Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, B.B. Warfield, Archibald Alexander, Joseph Addison Alexander, Lorraine Boettner, and Keith Mathison.

Their system of theology. Generally speaking, both amillennialism and postmillennialism are sub-divisions of covenant theology, a system prominent in both Presbyterian and Reformed denominations. Keith Mathison, the director of curriculum development for Ligionier School of Theology and an editorial assistant of Tabletalk magazine, gave this definition:

Covenant theology, as its name indicates, structures redemptive history around the covenants. Traditionally, covenant theologians have understood that the historical covenants are ultimately based upon an intratrinitarian covenant made before the foundation of the world. In this covenant, commonly called the covenant of redemption, God chose to redeem a people for Himself by sending the Son to accomplish their redemption and sending the Spirit to apply that redemption The historical covenants between God and man all flow from this initial covenant of redemption (Mathison, Postmillennialism, 14).

At the heart of covenant theology are three covenants: the covenant of redemption, made between the Father and the Son; the covenant of works, made between God and man; and the covenant of grace, made between God and the believer. Covenant theologians generally subscribe to infralapsarianism, a name given to an order of decrees willed by God:

1. God decreed to create man
2. God decreed to allow the fall of man
3. God decreed to elect some to salvation
4. God decreed to provide salvation for the elect through the death of Christ
5. God decreed to send the Holy Spirit to apply the value of Christ's death to the elect.

This order manifests the famous five points of consistent Calvinism (TULIP):

1. Total depravity
2. Unconditional election
3. Limited atonement
4. Irresistible grace
5. Perseverance of the saints

Covenant theologians affirm that God has only one plan of redemption, only one redeemed people, and only one future for His people. Cox stated: "Let us first get before us the age-old Christian teaching on this subject: God always has had but one people. In the Old Testament this people (the type) was called Israel. In the New Testament the antitype was known as the Church, or 'the Israel of God'" (Cox, Scotfieldism, 10).

John Gerstner, the mentor of R.C. Sproul, adds that "the covenantal view of the people of God sees in both dispensations the same people of God. All are members of the church, all are

born-again, and all are saved by the one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus. The same church of Jesus Christ comprises both.” (Gerstner, Primer, 7).

To them, there is no distinction between Israel and the church. Elect Israel is the true Church, and the true Church is the Israel of God. Thus, they logically denounce dispensationalism with its definitive distinction between Israel and the church. With an implied negative answer, Mathison asks: “Does God have two distinct plans for His people; ‘Plan A’ for Israel and ‘Plan B’ for the church?” (Mathison, Dispensationalism, back cover).

Gerstner ruled out a distinction between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Christ and a literal millennium by presupposition and his definition of the church. He wrote:

To be absorbed in the details of Daniel’s seventieth week while ignoring the fact that the interpretation splits the church of God through all eternity is pathetic, to say the least. Without any verse-by-verse refutation, it is obvious that any such interpretation is false. God clearly teaches that there is one Savior of God’s elect in all ages. Any interpretation that obscures this is false. Jesus Christ’s second coming is not to separate the church from the church, followed by a third coming to bring an end to the world. Without even looking at a single dispensational commentary in detail, it is perfectly obvious that a commentary which makes that out of the last book of the Bible is wrong.... “ (Gerstner, Primer, 34).

Intrinsic to covenant theology is a denial of a future literal millennium. The system affirms both a temporal messianic kingdom and an eternal consummate kingdom . Kik explained: “The messianic kingdom...begins in time and ends in time. For instance, the ‘thousand-year’ period of Revelation 20 cannot refer to the consummate kingdom because it commences in time with the binding of Satan and ends in time with the short period of release of Satan. It deals with time before the last judgment” (Kik, Eschatology, 17)

Kik then added: “The millennium, in other words, is the period of the gospel dispensation, the Messianic kingdom, the new heavens and the new earth, the regeneration, etc. The millennium commenced either with the ascension of Christ or with the day of Pentecost and

will remain until the second coming of Christ. There was a period of time when Jesus received the kingdom and there will be a period of time when He will surrender it to the Father” (Kik, Eschatology, 17).

Thus, according to covenant theology, we are now in the millennium, we are now in the kingdom. The Westminster Confession of Faith (chap. XXV.2) states: “The visible church... is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Smallman remarked: “We await the fullness of the Kingdom when Christ will come again in all of his power and glory. But in Christ’s person and work the Kingdom has come, and through the power of the Holy Spirit the Kingdom is coming as the Gospel goes forth, churches are planted, more people trust in Christ, and Christian people live as salt and light. Reformed teachers spoke of the Kingdom as ‘already and not yet’ to describe the day in which we now live” (Smallman, Reformed Church, 27-28).

The postmillennial branch of Covenant Theology seems to be the more outspoken in these days. Mathison boasted: “Postmillennialism is the system of eschatology that is most consistent with the relevant texts of Scripture, a covenantal approach to Scripture, and the nondisputed doctrines of Reformation theology” (Mathison, Postmillennialism, 10). Kik agreed: “The postmil looks for a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of a glorious age of the church upon earth through the preaching of the gospel under the power of the Holy Spirit. He looks forward to all nations becoming Christian and living in peace one with another. He relates all prophecies to history and time. After the triumph of Christianity throughout the earth he looks for the second coming of the Lord” (Kik, Eschatology, 4).

Their common opposition to dispensationalism. To Gerstner, dispensationalism is destructive, divisive, and anti-biblical. He wrote: “Although dispensationalism has been the instrument of my salvation, its message, though well intended, destroys the salvation

message....Dispensationalism divides rather than preserves the unity of the Bible. It divides the people of God. It divides salvation from the people of God. It divides the people of God into the endless future. These things are incompatible with a sound interpretation of the Bible. If nothing more than this is said, I believe this proves that dispensationalism is not a biblical doctrine, but it is, in fact, anti-biblical at its essential level” (Gerstner, Primer, 35). Harsh words, indeed! But wait, the rhetoric gets stronger. Gerstner claimed that dispensationalism was “against the cross of Jesus Christ” (Primer, 17), that it “departed from the only way of salvation (Primer, 15), that it “cannot be called Christian” (Primer, 15), and that it “is a cult” (Primer, 15). In his preface, Gerstner condemned “the abominable heresy of antinomianism, which is endemic to dispensationalism” (Primer, preface).

In his rejection of dispensationalism, Cox referred to a report adopted by the Southern Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1944: “It is the unanimous opinion of your committee that Dispensationalism is out of accord with the system of doctrines set forth in the Confession of Faith, not primarily or simply in the field of eschatology, but because it attacks the very heart of the theology of our church. Dispensationalism rejects the doctrine that God has, since the Fall, but one plan of salvation for all mankind and affirms that God has been through the ages administering various and diverse plans of salvation for various groups” (Cox, Scofieldism, 19-20).

Although this report reveals a misunderstanding and a misrepresentation of dispensationalism, it does show that covenant theology approaches the field of eschatology through the gateway of soteriology, whereas dispensationalism approaches the doctrine of last things through the doctrine of the church.

Their hermeneutics. Covenant theologians state they follow both literal and allegorical interpretations, based upon the literary genre and the context of the passage. Their theological system, however, drives their mode of interpretation. Ryrie observed: “The theological system does not permit an actual kingdom on this earth over which Christ reigns; therefore, certain passages cannot be interpreted literally” (Ryrie, Basic Theology, 112).

Reformed or covenant theologians, as evidenced by postmillennialism and amillennialism, have their minds made up even before they approach the inspired truth of Revelation 20. To them, one-thousand cannot literally mean one-thousand. There is no place in their system for any salvation experiences after the Second Coming of Christ, no place for a literal thousand-year experience of saints on the earth after the Second Coming. To them, time and human earthly experiences expire at the Second Coming.

ISSUE #2: THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHAPTER 20 TO CHAPTER 19

In the text, chapter 20 obviously follows chapter 19. The sequence of events revealed to John, in chapter 20 definitely follows those events revealed in chapter 19. There is no dispute over these matters. The contentious issue is whether the events recorded in chapter 20 will occur historically after the events recorded in chapter 19 (the premillennial position) or whether they happened (or will happen) before the Second Coming of Christ symbolized in 19:11-16 (the views of postmillennialism and amillennialism).

The Postmillennial and Amillennial View. Mathison charged that the premillennial interpretation “disagrees with the end-time chronology established elsewhere in the New Testament” (Mathison, Dispensationalism, 125).

Here is his concept of the eschatological end:

1. 1 Corinthians 15:22-24
The end immediately follows the resurrection of Christ's people at His coming
2. John 6:40
The resurrection occurs on the last day
3. John 5:28-29
The resurrection of God's people will be simultaneous with the resurrection of the wicked
4. 1 Corinthians 15:26, 54-55
The resurrection spells the defeat of the last enemy, namely death
5. Revelation 20:11-14
The destruction of death occurs at the Great White Throne. Thus the resurrection and the Great White Throne must occur together on the last day
6. 1 Corinthians 15:21
At the last day, Christ will deliver the kingdom over to the Father. The Messianic kingdom, therefore, must take place prior to the Second Coming. (Mathison, Dispensationalism, 126).

In a similar vein, Kuyper claimed that the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, the destruction of this world, and the rise of the new heavens and the new earth all occur at the time of the Second Coming. To him, therefore, there is no room for a literal one-thousand years before or after the Second Coming (Kuyper, Revelation, 272).

Mathison asserted that "the text only reveals the order in which John saw the visions, not necessarily the order in which the events were to take place" (Mathison, Dispensationalism, 131). To prove his point, he declared: "Elsewhere in the book of Revelation it is clear that the visions of John sometimes do not follow in historical succession. If they all did, then the birth of Christ (chap. 12) follows the sounding of the seventh trumpet of judgment (chap. 11)" (Mathison, Postmillennialism, 177).

It would have been helpful if Mathison would have pointed out the alleged inversions of sequence, but he did not. His only illustration can be easily explained. The seventh trumpet sounds in the middle of the seven-year period prior to the Second Coming. It is called the third woe (Rev. 8:13; 11:14) and is expressed as the woe when Satan is forced to the earth because

Michael defeated him in the war in the heavens (Rev. 12:7-12). In anger, Satan persecuted the woman for three-and-one half times, namely three-and-one half years (Rev. 12:13-17). Who is the woman and why did Satan single her out for persecution? The answer is to be found in her identification as Israel, the one through whom Christ was born (Rev. 12:1-5). Satan tried to kill Christ, but he failed, thus he will take out his spite upon Israel. The few verses which denote Christ's birth and ascension are necessary to explain the antagonism of Satan to God, to Christ, and to Israel, especially in the middle of the seven-year period.

Even the creation of the new universe is moved out of its chronological sequence (Rev. 21:1). Mathison argued: "As we explained in our discussion of Isaiah's prophecy [65:17-25], the new heaven and new earth is not wholly future. This kind of language is used to describe aspects of Christ's present work of salvation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). But neither is it wholly present. The whole creation will not be completely set free from corruption until the Second Coming (cf. Rom. 8:19-23)" (Mathison, Postmillennialism, 157). Here is an example of double interpretation. The first is spiritual or allegorical and is applied to the believer's present spiritual position in Christ. The second is literal and is accomplished at the Second Coming. Which is it? The event (Rev. 21:1) cannot be both literal and allegorical at the same time. This hermeneutical spin is designed to circumvent the fact that the new universe will be created one thousand years after the Second Coming, a truth that cannot be fit into the postmillennial system.

The premillennial view. The sequence of revelation to John is also the sequence of prophetic, historical fulfillment. Walvoord stated: "Arguments for this position are based on the natural sequence of events in chapter 20 following chapter 19, viewing them as sequential and as stemming from the second coming of Christ. Many passages speak of the second coming of Christ being followed by a reign of righteousness on earth" (Walvoord, Bible Knowledge, 978).

With the exception of two verses (Rev. 20:5, 6), every verse in chapter 20 begins with the connective “and” (kai). This grammatical feature was also used in chapter 19 (19:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21). The flow of narrative action can easily be detected in the constant usage of the connective. John saw one event after another unfold before his very eyes. The continuation of the connective from chapter 19 into chapter 20 gives the impression that the events of chapter 20 follow those recorded in chapter 19. To conclude that the events of chapter 20 precede those in chapter 19 is to violate the hermeneutical principle of observation before interpretation and the normal grammatical usage of the connective in a narrative passage.

Waymeyer proposed that the usage of the adverb “no more” (eti) in the purpose clause of Revelation 20:3 strongly suggests that the events described in 20:1-3 follow those described in 19:11-21. The use of the adverb indicates an interruption of something that was already taking place, namely deception of the nations by Satan. The action of binding, thus, could not occur before the Second Coming (Waymeyer, Revelation 20, 44-45).

The beast and the false prophet were cast into the lake of fire at the Second Coming (Rev. 19:20). Satan is later cast into the lake of fire, one thousand years later (Rev. 20:10). In the lake of fire Satan is reunited with the beast and the false prophet. This narrative action makes no sense if Satan is cast into the lake of fire at the same time as the other two. In fact, the phrase “where the beast and the false prophet are” presupposes an earlier judgment upon the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 19:20) and also suggests a chronological sequence of Revelation 20 events following those in chapter 19 (Waymeyer, Revelation 20, 45).

The phrase “thousand years” (chilia ete) occurs six times in this chapter (20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7). The term “chiliastic” is based upon the Greek word whereas the familiar term “millennium” is based upon the Latin (mille and annus). Thus, chiliastic or millennial views emerge from answers given to this question - Are the thousand years literal or non-literal? Premillennialism embraces a literal interpretation, whereas the non-literal, symbolic interpretation is championed by both amillennialism and postmillennialism.

The non-literal approach. Proponents have put forth these arguments.

First, Kistemaker stated that the time designator “thousand years” does not occur anywhere else in other New Testament eschatological teachings. Jesus did not mention it in the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25) No epistle refers to the millennial reign of Christ on earth (Kistemaker, Revelation, 535).

In response, the concept of progressive revelation within the inspired Scriptures allows for new truth, previously unknown or unwritten, to be recorded by the Biblical authors. The fact that the “thousand years” is mentioned six times is sufficient, in and of itself, based upon the principle that two or three witnesses establish a matter.

Second, Kistemaker claimed that the New Testament teaches only one return of Christ, not two (Kistemaker, Revelation, 535). Kuyper likewise argued that all future judgment happens at the Second Coming; thus there can be no judgment after the thousand years (Rev. 20:11-15) if Christ returned before the thousand years to execute judgment (Rev. 19:11-21). There are no two final judgments; thus there are no two future comings of Christ, and vice versa (Kuyper, Revelation, 263).

These non-literal proponents make no distinction in time between the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18) and the Second Coming. They are a singular, unified event.

Third, Kistemaker strangely affirmed that “the first mention of a thousand year period (v.2) is ‘the devil’s millennium extending from Satan’s stay in the Abyss until he is consigned to the lake of fire forever” (Kistemaker, Revelation, 535).

In response, I am not sure what Kistemaker hoped to gain by this assertion. He offered no further explanation. It is true that Satan and the thousand years are mentioned together in three of the six verses (Rev. 20:2, 3, 7). However, in the other three verses, the thousand years is related to believers, namely their resurrection and reign (Rev. 20:4, 5, 6).

Fourth, the advocates of the non-literal approach argue that since the Book of Revelation is a book of symbols, numbers must also be symbolized.. Kistemaker stated that “one thousand is ten to the third power and denotes fullness. It is therefore more in line with the tone and tenor of Revelation to interpret the term metaphorically” (Kistemaker, Revelation, 535). He also said that the “number [7] should not be taken literally, but must be understood as an idea that expresses totality or completeness” (Revelation, 4).

In response, do not the terms “fullness,” “totality,” and “completeness” all denote the same concept? Why wasn’t the phrase “seven years” used in Revelation 20? Why wasn’t the phrase “one-thousand churches” used in chapter 1? Or, why do we not read about one-thousand seals, one-thousand trumpets, or one-thousand bowls if the phrase “one-thousand” symbolizes “fullness?” If “one-thousand” means “fullness,” then why do we have “144,000” sealed servants and why do we have 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel? Would not “one-thousand servants” have been sufficient to symbolize a full complement? Such assignment of symbolical significance to numbers is too subjective and arbitrary. It does a disservice to numerical adjectives and to grammatical syntax.

Fifth, Mathison observed that there is no mention of Jews, Israel, Jerusalem, or the Temple in Revelation 20. Thus, he concluded that the thousand years could not be literal as dispensationalism claims (Mathison, Dispensationalism, 125).

In response, to use the same tenor of his argument, where is the mention of the church? Such an argument from silence is invalid.

Conclusion. Kistemaker speaks not only for himself, but for the entire non-literal approach when he said: “It seems best to take the term one thousand symbolically to refer to an indefinite period between the ascension of Jesus and his return” (Kistemaker, Revelation, 536). He also wrote that “one-thousand years” does not express time but completeness (Revelation, 45).

The literal approach.

First, the normal, ordinary meaning of a “thousand years” is a “thousand years.” This is the essence of literal interpretation. In popular expression - if the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense. Walvoord correctly observed: “This chapter presents the fact that Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years. If this chapter is taken literally, it is relatively simple to understand what is meant” (Walvoord, Bible Knowledge, 977).

Second, an indefinite brief period of time is indicated in the context. Satan will be released from the abyss for “a little time” (mikron chronon; 20:3). The Holy Spirit could have guided John to write that Christ and the saints would reign for “a long time” (polun chronon), the same phrase used in the parable of the talents to indicate the period of absence for the lord prior to his return (Matt. 25:19). John, however, was superintended to contrast a definite period (thousand years) with an indefinite period (short time).

Third, all time designations in the Book of Revelation are literal, only having significance if their temporal meanings are accepted normally. The list includes five months (9:5, 10), an hour and day and month and year (9:15), forth-two months (11:2; 13:5), 1260 days (11:3; 12:6), and a time, times, and half a time (12:14).

Fourth, whenever the word “year” occurs with a numerical adjective (e.g. forty years, three years) in Scripture, it always refers to a regular calendar year. The non-literal view makes Revelation 20 to be the exception. The burden of proof is upon them to show otherwise.

Occasionally, some will reference 2 Peter 3:8 and Psalm 90:4 in defense of a non-literal meaning. Peter wrote “that with the Lord one day is a thousand years, and thousand years as one day.” For this comparison to make sense, the literal meaning of the time phrases must be accepted. The infinite, eternal God does not view time as we do, but He does know the distinction between a 24-hour day and a millennium. The Psalm conveys the same idea.

Fifth, Thomas argued that “no number in Revelation is verifiably a symbolic number” (Thomas, Revelation, 8-22, 408). All numbers should be accepted literally, at face value. For example, there are seven churches, not eight or nine nor an indefinite number. The distinctions in numerical value must be maintained throughout the book. They remain a literal constant in a book of symbols and metaphors.

ISSUE #4: THE BINDING OF SATAN

Premillennialism teaches that Satan will be bound at the Second Coming of Christ (20:1-3). Both postmillennialism and amillennialism teach that Satan is already bound.

The time. Kistemaker affirmed: “Since Jesus’ ascension, Satan has been unable to stop the advance of the gospel of salvation. He has been bound and is without authority while the

nations of the world around the globe have received the glad gospel tidings. The Son of God has taken possession of these nations (Ps. 2:7-8) and has deprived Satan of leading them astray during this gospel age” (Kistemaker, Revelation, 535-536). Kik gives a different starting point for the binding of Satan. He wrote: “The thousand years mentioned in verse three make up the gospel dispensation from the first coming of Christ till that brief period of apostasy expressed in the words: ‘and after that he must be loosed a little season.’... During that period Satan will not be able to control the nations as he did before the first coming of Christ” (Kik, Eschatology, 45).

Which is it? Was Satan bound at Christ’s first coming or at His ascension? If Satan was bound at Christ’s ascension and alleged enthronement, then passages dealing with Christ’s earthly ministry of exorcism cannot be used as proofs for a past historical binding of Satan. Since premillennialists reject either view, the proponents of a past binding need to settle their differences.

The passages used to prove a past binding are Matthew 12:29; Luke 10:17-18; John 12:31-32; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15; and 1 John 3:8.

After Christ cast out a demon from a blind and mute man, he was accused of doing exorcism in the power of Beelzebub. As part of His defense, Christ declared: “Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house” (Matt. 12:29). One demon was cast out of one person. If Satan had been bound completely at that event, then all demon possessed individuals should have been delivered simultaneously. However, many remained demon possessed in the Gospel period, the time of apostolic ministry, and in our present day. Christ used that analogy to justify his miraculous action upon one man at one point of time.

There is no statement in the Gospels or in the Acts that Satan was bound in the past.

Contrariwise, the Bible teaches that Satan is extremely active in the present age (Waymeyer,

Revelation 20, 14-15):

- a. He entered Judas and influenced him to betray Christ (Luke 22:3; John 13:37).
- b. He sought to sift Peter like wheat (Luke 22:31).
- c. He filled the heart of Ananias and influenced him to lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3).
- d. He sent a messenger to buffet the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 12:7).
- e. He thwarted Paul from traveling to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:18).
- f. He snatches the Word of God from unbelieving hearers of the gospel before it can take root (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12).
- g. He tells lies (John 8:44).
- h. He has unbelievers under his dominion (Acts 26:18).
- i. He tempts believers (1 Cor 7:5).
- j. He seeks to take advantage of believers (2 Cor. 2:11).
- k. He is called the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4).
- l. He blinds the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor 4:4).
- m. He seeks to deceive believers as he did with Eve (2 Cor. 11:13).
- n. He disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).
- o. He is at work in unbelievers to influenced them to live as they do (Eph. 2:2).
- p. He seeks to deceive believers as he battles against them (Eph. 6:11-12).
- q. He deceives and traps unbelievers (2 Tim. 2:26)
- r. He holds unbelievers captive to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26).
- s. He prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).
- t. He is the father of those who practice sin (1 John 3:8-10)
- u. He holds unbelievers in his power (1 John 5:19).

How could Satan be bound and so active at the same time? It defies logic and the testimony of Scripture to affirm both of theses contradictory realities.

The meaning. According to Mathison, Satan and his power have been “greatly restricted,” “greatly curtailed,” and “bound in some sense” in this present age (Mathison, Dispensationalism, 127). He also wrote: “The binding of Satan does not entail the cessation of his activity (cf. 1 Peter 5:8), but it does mean that he is no longer able to prevent the spread of the gospel to the nations” (Mathison, Postmillennialism, 155).

Kistemaker said: “When Satan was cast out of heaven and hurled to the earth, he lost the authority he once possessed” (Kistemaker, Revelation, 535). He equated the binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3) with the forced expulsion by Michael (Rev. 12:7-13). However, there is a great difference in the geographical movement. In Revelation 12, Satan went from heaven to earth, whereas in Revelation 20, he went from earth to the abyss. The abyss is never equated with the earth.

In that connection, Kik in a reference to Jude v.6 wrote: “There we read that the fallen angels were bound with chains, yet that did not prevent their activity in the world.... The Gospels reveal the activities of these fallen angels Therefore to be chained does not mean cessation of evil activity. Even so Satan, though bound, continues his evil work” (Kik, Eschatology, 194). These chained angels are only one group of fallen angels; they cannot be equated with all fallen angels. Fallen angels who are free to afflict humans do not want to go to the abyss (Luke 8:31). The abyss and Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4) are places of darkness where some fallen angels are chained as they await divine judgment. They are inactive in their imprisonment. Satan and all other fallen angels will join them when Satan will be seized, bound, cast into the abyss, and sealed for one thousand years.

If Satan is bound today, then why was he dwelling in Pergamos where his throne was (Rev. 2:13)? Both believers and unbelievers were in that same place, namely a city in provincial Asia. Can it be said that believers are also in the abyss?

Kik gave this exposition of the binding of Satan: “Previous to the first coming of Christ, the Gentile nations were under the complete control and dominance of Satan. All nations were pagan and without true religion. But with the coming of Christ this was all to change. Nations were not to be deceived entirely. This does not mean that individuals within nations or even a

great portion of them would not be deceived, but during the period of the binding of Satan the nations would not be entirely deceived as were Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Never until that short period just before the second coming of Christ would the nations be deceived as they were before the first coming of Christ. To that end Satan was bound” (Kik, Eschatology, 194).

Kik’s interpretation, however, does not properly exegete the passage. The binding is thorough and decisive, not progressive nor partial. The verbal actions “laid hold” (ekratesen), “bound” (edesen), “cast” (ebalen), “shut” (ekleisen), and “sealed” (esphragisen) are all aorist tenses, indicating decisive, completed actions. Not one is in the imperfect tense, indicating continuous action in the past. In addition, the negative purpose clause (“so that he should deceive the nations no more”) reveals a break between a time of deception and a time of no deception. There is no provision for a limited or partial deception.

Also, did Kik forget about the national repentance of Nineveh and Assyria through the preaching of Jonah? In addition, are not Islamic and Buddhist countries just as deceived as were Egypt and Persia?

ISSUE #5: THE RESURRECTIONS

Revelation 20:4-6 focuses on the resurrection of humans, whereas Revelation 20:1-3 centered on the binding of Satan. Out of these three verses (20:4-6) have emerged three major interpretations about the resurrections.

Spiritual regeneration. Kik claimed that “the rebirth of the soul is the first resurrection” (Kik, Eschatology, 182). The second resurrection is “the resurrection of the body which is to take place at the second coming of Christ” (Kik, Eschatology, 183). The second resurrection includes

the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked of all the ages. Kenneth Gentry simply stated: “The first resurrection is - salvation” (Gentry, in Four Views on the Book of Revelation, 85). The position that the first resurrection is spiritual regeneration is held by postmillennialists.

First, they argue that the new birth is described in resurrection terminology (Mark 12:26-27; John 5:25-29; 11:25; Rom. 6:4-6; 8:10-11; Eph. 2:1, 4-6; Col. 2:12-13; 3:1; 1 John 3:14; 5:11-13). For example, God made alive those who were dead in sins (Eph. 2:1, 4-6), and all believers have passed from spiritual death into spiritual life (1 John 3:14). To them, the first death is the death of the human soul (Gen. 2:17); therefore, the first resurrection is the quickening of that soul, namely getting saved (Kik, Eschatology, 43).

In response, it is true that all men are dead in trespasses and sins, that all believing sinners receive eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, and that all believers are in Christ, positionally crucified, raised up, ascended, and seated in Him. However, the term “resurrection” (anastasis; 20:5, 6) is never used in salvation passages to refer to spiritual regeneration. In addition, the verb “lived” (ezesan), used twice (20: 4, 5), must have the same meaning in the context. It cannot refer to spiritual life in 20:4 and to bodily resurrection life in 20:5. The postmillennial interpretation is arbitrary, imposed upon the text in faulty eisegesis. Also, the persons were beheaded before they lived (20:4). In effect, according to their view, logical consistency would mean that spiritual regeneration came after physical death. Also, the group lived at the same time (aorist tense) in order to reign at the same time. If the meaning were spiritual regeneration, then all of them would have to be saved at Christ’s first advent or ascension because that is when postmillennialists date the beginning of the millennium. In reality, believing sinners get saved at different times within the millennium according to their

definition of the thousand years. They have a contradiction between their interpretation and the actual spiritual experiences of believers.

Second, they argue that John saw “souls” (psuchas) and that the “souls lived.” Hamilton wrote: “The deliberate choice of the word ‘soul,’ which almost universally means soul as distinct from body, as applying to the believers now reigning with Christ in glory, seems to make it perfectly plain that the first resurrection is [the new birth]. If it were a literal resurrection of the body, why should the author choose a word which almost always does not mean body?” (Hamilton, The Basis of Millennial Faith, 134).

In response, note the words “almost always.” In fact, the word “soul” can refer to the total person, both the body and the soul, the material and the immaterial parts of man (James 5:20; 1 Peter 3:20). Peter stated that “eight souls were saved through water.” You can be sure that Noah and his family went into the ark in their bodies as well as in their souls. Regardless, John saw the souls “of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God.” The subject of the verb “lived,” namely “they,” refers back to the martyred believers.

Physical death of the believer. Hendriksen stated that the first resurrection means “the translation of the soul from this sinful earth to God’s holy heaven” (Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors, 231-232). This event occurs at the physical death of the believer. This typical amillennial position identifies the first resurrection with the intermediate state of the soul between actual physical death and actual physical resurrection.

Even the postmillennialist Kik disagreed with this view. He charged that when a soul leaves a body to dwell in heaven, it is not a resurrection. The soul in a believer is always alive, never in a dead state (Kik, Eschatology, 42). We premillennialists can agree with Kik in his

criticism. We can also use the same arguments against this position that we used in the rebuttal of the postmillennial position of spiritual regeneration.

Physical resurrection. Premillennialism teaches that the first resurrection is the physical resurrection of dead believers before the thousand-year begins and that the second resurrection is the physical resurrection of all dead unbelievers at the end of the millennium. The following arguments support this position.

First, the noun “resurrection” (anastasis) always refers to a physical resurrection.

Second, the verb “lived” (ezesan) must be interpreted in the same sense within this context. Thomas concluded that the verb “to live” (zao) always refers to physical resurrection in those passages that deal with physical death (Thomas, Revelation, 8-22, 417).

Third, Walvoord asserted: “If the church were raptured prior to this event, as premillenarians teach, it would make sense to single out these martyred dead for resurrection. But if the church were not raptured, it would be most unusual to ignore all the martyrs of preceding generations, the church as a whole, and to specify this relatively small group” (Walvoord, Bible Knowledge, 979). Walvoord’s logic is good, but a word of caution must be given. There is no specific mention of the resurrection of Old Testament believers either.

Fourth, both the Old and the New Testaments teach that there will be a resurrection of the redeemed and a resurrection of the unsaved. Daniel wrote: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). There are two categories of resurrected people here, with contrasting eternal destinies. In the context, the two resurrections occur after Michael stands up for Israel (Dan. 12:1), to be fulfilled at the war in heaven between Michael and Satan (Rev. 12:7-12). The two resurrections also happen after a time of unprecedented trouble (Dan. 12:1), referenced by Christ

(Matt. 24:21), and seen in the Satanic persecution of Israel after his forced descent to the earth in the middle of the seven-year period (Dan. 12:13-17).

Jesus Christ announced: “Do not marvel at this: for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29). Daniel said that “many” would be raised, a term that some might use to believe not all would be resurrected. However, Christ used “all” to indicate that no one would be excluded.

In Paul’s defense before the Roman governor Felix and his Jewish adversaries, the apostle proclaimed that there would be “a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:15).

In all of these three key passages, the resurrection of the saved is mentioned before the resurrection of the unsaved. These passages also do not mention a gap of time between the two resurrections. Because of that fact, both postmillennialists and amillennialists conclude that there will be a general resurrection of both the saved and the unsaved at the Second Coming of Christ. Gentry postulated: “Why should we believe that the New Testament everywhere teaches a general, singular resurrection on the last day, only to discover later in the most difficult book of the Bible that there are actually two specific, distantly separated resurrections for different classes of people?” (Gentry, Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond, ed. Bock, 243).

The three key passages speak to the fact of resurrection and to the categories of resurrected people. In themselves, they do not exclude the possibility of a time distance between the two. The concept of progressive divine revelation allows for the time factor to be disclosed later for proper understanding.

At this point, may I make a suggestion that the resurrection of the church dead not be included in the first resurrection. Posttribulationists have constantly accused us pretribulationists of teaching three resurrections. If the church age is a mystery, if the translation of living church believers is a mystery, then maybe the resurrection of the church dead should also be part of the mystery era. This point needs further study and discussion.

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