

Newsletter January 2019

In this Newsletter, we shall discuss the consummation of a major Old-Testament Kingdom-Age prophecy, as we now consider the text of Chapter 20. This prophecy, like so many other Old-Testament prophecies concerning the nation of Israel, finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Book of Revelation. In the first seven verses of this chapter, it becomes quite evident that this future age will exist for one-thousand years, which is commonly referred to as the Millennium. “Millennia” is a Latin word derived from the Greek word *chilioi* found in these verses, which is very specific and unquestionably means “thousand.” Likewise, the Greek word *etos* clearly means “year.” “Millennium,” where the prefix “milli” specifically means one thousand, unquestionably means a thousand years. Millennialism, then referred to as *Chiliasm*, prevailed as a major doctrine in the earliest days of the Church, such that a denial of *Chiliasm* would have been considered a form of heresy.

All of this is quite obvious, yet a strange controversy persists over the meaning of the Latin word “Millennium” relative to its use in these seven verses. One group of professing Christians believes that Jesus will return after a “millennial age” on earth ends, while a second group denies that such an age will objectively exist at all. Briefly stated here, the Post-millennial position is founded upon the belief that the preaching of the Gospel by devout men of the church will eventually convert all of mankind and will thus usher in a “kingdom age.” This view first had its beginnings in Roman Catholicism, and it still prevails within many of today’s Protestant denominational reformed churches. Post-millennialists consider the “thousand years,” mentioned in Revelation Chapter 20, to be a metaphoric term, a period of time corresponding to the present church age, in which Jesus has spiritually ruled upon earth from Heaven through specific men of the church. At the conclusion of this age, it is believed that Christ will return to lay claim to the completed kingdom. An assumption regarding a nebulous length of the “millennium” has become quite necessary, inasmuch as nearly two thousand years have already transpired since Jesus’ ascension, and He has not yet returned to take over the reigns of the church.

A great number of Post-millennialists eventually came to the realization that the church on earth will never be able to convert the entire world, inasmuch as the total and obstinate depravity of man has been so openly revealed in two world wars and even more recently in semi-organized terrorism. Moreover, moral decadence has been obviously getting worse world-wide over time, not better. Therefore, with the sole exception of the *Roman Catholic Church*, many of this persuasion have been forced to accept the fact that a perfect millennial age is unachievable by the church. Even so, some of today’s evangelicals still hold such a high view of the temporal church that they are blinded to the worsening realities of world conditions relative to their best efforts. With the strong influence of humanism being so widespread in today’s churches, many still cling to the post-millennial position in practice if not in doctrine – especially when world affairs seem to be on the mend for a time.

As to the more pragmatic realists within this first group, they now comprise a second group known as A-millennialists, where the “A” prefix denotes a negation of any form of “millennialism.” A-millennialism only came into broad acceptance near the beginning of the twentieth century. These now argue from the outset that there will be no thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ on earth at all. They envision Christ suddenly returning to earth one day in judgment, ending all future activity on earth, as the eternal ages immediately begin. While Post-millennialists metaphorically fit the events of Revelation within the present church age, A-millennialists attempt to fit the events piecemeal into various historic periods primarily within the four-hundred years preceding the church era or compressed within the first seven decades of the first century AD. Because of their belief that the Revelation does not carry any future prophetic implications, they argue that the “thousand years” found in Revelation Chapter 20:2–7 is after all only mentioned in a “few obscure verses” of that equally obscure book; therefore in their view, “one thousand years” carries no real or literal significance.

In complete contrast, those who believe that Jesus Christ will physically return in the future to personally establish his thousand-year Kingdom of Heaven on earth are commonly known as Pre-millennialists, who hold to a literal prophetic futurist interpretation of the Revelation. A coming kingdom age on earth can be traced back to the Old Testament, which is replete with prophecies concerning a future Kingdom age. One such prophecy is found in the book of Isaiah: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for

out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Is.2:2-4). Inasmuch as this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled in history, it must be fulfilled in the future.

Both Post-millennialism and A-millennialism deny the credibility of a literal interpretation and chronological order of the text, to which we have so firmly held throughout this commentary on the Revelation. That Pre-millennial position remains evident as we now move on in our continuing study of the Revelation into Chapter 20.

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season” (Re.20:1-3).

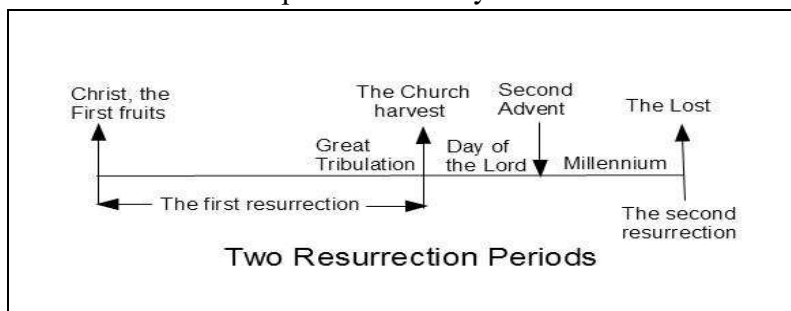
At long last, all opposition will have been put down by Christ, and the wondrous Kingdom Age will dawn as Jesus Christ, victorious in battle, takes his rightful place on the throne of the Earth as its “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” Up until this time, Satan had run free upon the earth seeking out men and women whom he may subvert through his evil influence. With Jesus ruling upon the throne of the earth for the next one thousand years, there will be no place left for Satan on earth or in Heaven. We read earlier that the Antichrist and the False Prophet along with those who worshiped the image of the Antichrist, had been cast into Hell (cf. Re.19:20). These were the first occupants of Hell, which had just been opened to receive them, but Satan had seemingly escaped judgment. This delay may be attributable to his unique high standing as an archangel, of which only three are mentioned by name in all of Scripture (i.e. Gabriel, Michael, and Satan).

Therefore, Satan, that old serpent who tempted Eve in the garden, will now be incarcerated for a thousand years so that he can no longer exercise his ability to tempt and subvert men upon the earth during the Millennial Age. The place of his imprisonment is the “bottomless pit” from which God had previously permitted him to release a swarm of his demons. It is significant to note that Satan, a magnificent archangel, was humbled by an angel of lower rank as he placed chains upon him. A seal was also placed upon Satan so he could no longer deceive mankind nor in any way continue to entice them to commit evil for the entire term of his imprisonment.

Why God would loose Satan after the Millennium for “a little season” is connected with the greater question of why God would have permitted evil to enter the garden of Eden through the person of Satan to begin with. However, as we view how God has dealt with evil in his mortal creation, we can better understand the mind of God through his attributes of love, grace, mercy, and redemption. Only against the backdrop of evil can God’s goodness be seen in all its resplendence, even as we simultaneously observe his ability and determination to judge sin. Christ has provided atonement for the sins of mankind, but no atonement is possible for Satan. His demise was assured through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Satan’s ultimate judgment still awaits him, as we shall soon discover.

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Re.20:4).

John saw thrones upon which many were seated. In them he saw the souls of those that had been beheaded for



the witness of Jesus, which specifically identifies them as martyred Christians. They had stood firm for the Word of God under the severest testing in every age. They had not worshiped the Antichrist or his image, but had witnessed for Christ and had refused his mark on their foreheads or in their hands. This is an indication that at least some of these men had lived on earth during the terrible reign of the

Antichrist, which reasonably supports the view that the Church could have remained on earth during that part of

his reign before the Rapture had occurred. All of these had been resurrected to live and reign with Christ on earth during the millennial age as judges over the nations.

“But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Re.20:5,6).

The “rest of the dead” refers to those who had not met the requirements of those mentioned in verse 4. It is stated that they will not be resurrected until the millennial age comes to an end. This constitutes a second resurrection, inasmuch as the redeemed were uniquely a part of an earlier resurrection. Resurrection in both of these instances is *anastasei* in the Greek, which literally means “to stand up.” Since it is unimaginable how a soul or spirit could stand up, this obviously means that both constitute a physical bodily resurrection. Those of the first resurrection are holy (i.e. blessed and uniquely set aside) so that they will never suffer the second death. Physical death, the first death, is a separation of the soul from the mortal body, which all will have suffered, but more to be feared is the second death, which is a final separation of soul and spirit from God and all that is eternally good.

These two resurrections are illustrated in the figure shown above. When Christ was resurrected from the dead, He brought many Old Testament saints along with Him out of paradise as firstfruits of the first resurrection. This first resurrection was concluded with the Rapture of the Church. The second resurrection is a general resurrection of the reprobate that will take place at the end of the millennium just prior to the vast eternal ages that follow.

“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom *is* as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them” (Re.20:7-9).

Near the very end of the millennium, Satan will be freed from the bottomless pit, the abyss. True to his evil nature, he will immediately go forth to deceive all the Gentile nations on earth located east, west, north, and south of the holy city of Jerusalem. “Gog” as it is used here likely refers to rulers of nations who oppose God, and “Magog” is a reference to the hostile masses living within those nations (cf. Ez 38:2). Even after experiencing a perfect government and a time of perfect peace and merciful judgment, the nations will once again fall for the same lie Satan had previously used to deceive Eve. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, *saying*, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Ps.2:2,3). So, the nations will come together within a massive revolution to surround the beloved city of Jerusalem. “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (Ps.2:4). God quickly ends this rebellion by sending fire down out of Heaven to consume them.

“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Re. 20:10).

In this verse we find that Satan will be the third major occupant of Hell, which is described as a lake of fire and brimstone. It is located in a place of outer darkness where the light of God’s mercy can never reach its occupants. Satan is not presently in Hell as popular folklore presumes. He is the prince of the air and presently controls much that goes on in the world as he prowls the earth in an effort to indwell the ungodly. Nevertheless, he will precede his followers, who have died as pawns in his rebellion against God, into Hell, and He shall be tormented forever.

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Re.20:11,12).

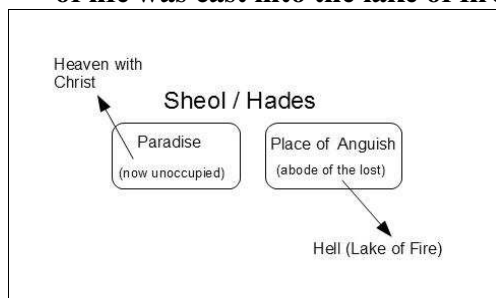
Next, John saw a great white throne. This throne differs from the one in God’s royal throne room, which John previously saw in Revelation Chapter 4. That throne gleamed with every color of the rainbow, while this one is stark white. While John describes no visible image of the one sitting upon that heavenly throne, His face is so overpowering in its appearance that the earth and the heavens fled away from it and the fearful dominance it commanded. It would appear that this throne was not on earth nor in Heaven, but stood alone in a vast eternal

emptiness. It is God, the Son, sitting upon this great white throne not God, the Father, inasmuch as the Father has given all judgment of mankind over to the Son that they must honor Him whom they had previously denied (cf. Jn.5:22). This is clearly the glorified Christ, whom John had first seen back in Chapter 1.

Then John saw the dead of every stature and from every station of their mortal lives standing before God. This is those of the second resurrection. The books referred to here in this passage is *bibilon* in the Greek, which literally means a roll or a scroll. This first set of scrolls contain an unedited record of every deed committed on earth by all those who stand before the throne. Each of their lives stand open before them so that every man and woman must read of their evil deeds for themselves. There is no defense possible, for these records clearly condemn every one of them and ignorance is no defense, “for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Ro. 1:20). Therefore, everyone who has ever said that he or she could stand before the judgment seat of God and mount a successful defense of their actions will discover they have nothing to say.

When the Lamb’s book of life was searched, few, if any, of this great multitude will find their names written down, inasmuch as the greater number of the redeemed will have been participants in the first resurrection. Nevertheless, as Jesus stated to his disciples, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Mt.7:22,23). These are those who falsely believed they were Christians and that they would be saved by their works apart from a redemptive relationship with Christ through a new birth. These find themselves condemned with the other reprobates, who must be judged according to their works alone. Those who had done extremely wicked deeds will be punished much greater than those who had done somewhat less wicked deeds, as they are recorded in the scrolls detailing their mortal lives. Each must receive their just reward – to each according to their sins. Even so, all of this great reprobate multitude of resurrected dead must go into the lake of fire, and none will be spared.

“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Re.20:13-15).



The Greek word translated as “Hell” in this verse is actually *Hades*, which is properly understood as the unseen place of departed souls or in the physical sense, the grave. Hades is represented in the illustration shown here as containing two widely separated areas. One is labeled Paradise and the other a Place of Anguish. When Old Covenant saints died their souls went into Paradise, often referred to as “Abraham’s bosom” (cf. Lu.16:22). When Jesus died, his soul went down into Hades, and when He rose from the dead the saintly occupants of paradise were resurrected with Him. When He ascended into Heaven He took them in his train along with Him. Thus, paradise is presently empty. The souls of the reprobate under the Old Covenant as well as those under the New Covenant enter instead into the place of anguish, within *Hades*, awaiting their resurrection and judgment before the great white throne. The “lake of fire,” mentioned in this verse, is the final place of eternal torment, which is properly referred to as Hell, as we think of it.

The sea gave up the dead (i.e. corpses of the dead) that were buried in it. Likewise, death and the grave gave up the bodies held in them. Death in this verse refers to death as a personalized thing. Many of the bodies delivered up had long since returned to the elements from which they were created and thus must have been reconstituted into their original mortal forms. Bodies that had been burned alive or cremated after death cannot be omitted from this resurrection, for their scattered elements still remain for them to be reconstituted. Every “man” was judged according to their works. The Greek word for man is *hekastos*, which means each is identified as a uniquely created human being and must therefore include women as well as men.

After death and the grave had given up their charges, death and *Hades* were both cast into the lake of fire, for their purpose had been fulfilled in the first death, the separation of the soul from the body of flesh. This final judgment of the reprobate is referred to as the “second death” wherein both body and soul were cast into Hell, the lake of fire, without any hope of reprieve, pardon, or redemption. © Arthur J. Smith January 2019