

## Eschatology for a Child of Ten

### The Millennial

My eldest granddaughter, who became ten years old on July 4, 2011, is attending a Christian school in Florida, and for that I am grateful. The school has a solid academic record and offers many auxiliary programs to include drama, choir and band. Unfortunately, from my Reformed perspective, the school has a theological bias in the area of eschatology or matters of the future. Specifically the school embraces a theory of the future called Dispensationalism which is a distinct theological school of thought that traces its dubious origin back to c. 1830 and the teachings of John Nelson Darby.

In Dispensational theology Jesus Christ is *not* now King of kings and Lord of lords but one day in the future He *shall be* King of kings and Lord of lords as He comes to reign on earth for a literal one thousand years. Today Christ is Prophet and Priest, but not a King.

For the Dispensationalist, the biblical basis for this belief is found in Revelation 20:1-6.

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3 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. 4 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. 5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 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.”

Usually, before a Dispensationally taught student is led to read this passage in Revelation 20 a lot of indoctrination has taken place before hand. The student is informed that when Jesus returns to earth He will return to Jerusalem where He will sit on the throne of David and reside over an exalted nation of Israel whose land will extend from the River Euphrates to the Nile according to promise. Moreover, a Third Temple will have been rebuilt and animal sacrifices will be slaughtered once more in memorial for what Christ did at Calvary. For a thousand years Jesus will rule over the nations on earth.

With these presuppositional concepts in mind the student is then led to Revelation 20 as a proof passage.

However, once the passage is read, there are some facts that should be brought to a student's attention, especially one who has been indoctrinated with dispensational teaching.

First, the student should be reminded of what is not in the text. Israel is *not* in the text. Jerusalem is *not* in the text. The throne of David is *not* in the text. The promise of land to Abraham is *not* in the text. A Third Temple rebuilt is *not* in the text. Animal sacrifices are *not* in the text. And, the nations of the earth are *not* in the text.

Second, the student should be informed to read carefully what is in the text. Specifically, they should be reminded that Jesus is not going to be King of kings and Lord of lords in the future but He is even now ruling and reigning. After His resurrection Jesus said to His disciples,

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:17-20).

It is because Christ now rules and reigns that the scene presented in Revelation 20 becomes important and precious especially for Christians who on earth are killed for the cause of Christ. What happens to the souls of those who are persecuted unto death, even beheaded? With breathless excitement John tells his readers that the souls of those who died for the Lord live. Yes! They live and they sit upon heavenly thrones and even now judgment is given unto them as they reign with Christ a thousand years.

Does John mean a literal thousand years, or does John refer to a fullness or completion? Are the thousands years to be interpreted as literal, or are they symbolic?

By letting Scripture interpret Scripture, it is not difficult to see that John intends his readers to understand that the martyred saints shall reign with Christ for a complete period of time. The concept of a “thousand years” or a “thousand generations” standing for fullness or completion is found often in Scripture.

The Lord says in Psalms 50:10 that He owns “the cattle upon a thousand hills” meaning that He owns all that are upon the earth.

- *Psalms 50:10 For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.*

The Lord says that He will keep His covenant for a thousand generations.

- *Deuteronomy 7:9 Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;*

The prophet Isaiah uses the term “thousand” to set forth the glories of the Messianic period.

- *Isaiah 7:23 And it shall come to pass in THAT DAY, that every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall even be for briers and thorns. With arrows and with bows shall men come hither; because All the land shall become briers and thorns."*

When John says he saw the martyred dead living and reigning with Christ in heaven for a thousand years, he is saying that, “for them death has been utterly vanquished. The second death has no power over them. Physical death for them is not a thing to be feared, for it is the gateway to life everlasting. Moreover, they are to be the priests of God and of Christ. The Latin for priest is pontifex, which means a bridge-builder. The priest is the builder of a bridge between God and man; and he, as the Jews saw it, is the one man with the right of direct access into the presence of God. Those who have been loyal to Jesus Christ have the right of free entry into the presence of God; and they have the privilege of introducing others to Jesus Christ. They are to reign with Christ. In Christ even the most ordinary man becomes a king” (Dr. William Barclay).