



## **Will Jesus Reign On Earth For A Thousand Years?** by Dr. Sellers Crain, Jr Revelation 20:1-7

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

Revelation is also called the Apocalypse. The word which translates both of these words in the Greek is *apokalypsis*. It does not mean concealed, but rather, something "being revealed" or "uncovered." It is the only book of prophecy in the New Testament (**Revelation 1:3; 22:18**). It contains:

... image-based symbolism, numbers and specific or significant periods of time.... [It] describes in almost ritualistic terms, John's vision of how Christ will return when it is time for God to judge all earthly beings and reward the faithful with eternal, joyful life. (Amanda Prohl, **Learn Religions: Christianity**, April 23, 2019).

(See **Revelation 20:10-22:20**). Where this article is concerned, most of it has already been fulfilled. This is based on what David Roper calls, "**The 'Select Wisely Approach**," which he said "many current commentators, such as Leon Marris" and Ray Summers "have followed." (**Truth for Today Commentary** on Revelation, pp. 26-27) How do we interpret this chapter? Dr. W. B. West makes a good point when he says that this is not hard to understand "if we read it through first century glasses."

Millennium comes from two words, "mille" and "annus," which are the Latin words for "thousand" and "year" which translate into a thousand-years. There are four systems of theology that emanate from this passage. **Post Millennialism**, although popular many years ago, is almost unheard of today. It means that Jesus would come after the thousand years were over. **Historic Premillennialism** was the most popular view of **Revelation** in the first three centuries of the Christian era. It was held by many of the early church fathers, such as Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Polycarp, Hippolytus, and Papias. Those holding this view believe that Christ will return after the thousand years are over. This view is now known as **Post Historic**. It holds that the church was very much in the view of Old Testament prophecies.

**Premillennialism** teaches that Christ will begin His thousand-year reign after the rapture of the saints and the seven-year tribulation. Premillenarians hold that after the tribulation, Christ will return and fight the Battle of Armageddon. Being victorious, Christ will reign on earth in Jerusalem for a thousand years. This position gives little if any real recognition to the church. The more popular form of this doctrine is **Dispensational Premillennialism**, first introduced by J.N. Darby (1800-1882) of the Plymouth Brethren, formerly an Anglican priest. It was popularized by C. I. Scofield's Study Bible. It holds that human history is divided up into "dispensations" in which God dealt with people in different ways. Although some dispensationalists may differ on the divisions of the dispensations, the majority hold to Scofield's seven-fold plan:

Innocence (before the fall); Conscience (from the fall to the flood); Human Government; Promise (Abraham to Moses); Law (Moses to Christ); Grace (the church age); Kingdom (the Millennium). Scofield wrote,

These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God's method of dealing with mankind, in respect to two questions: of sin, and of man's responsibility.

**A-millennialism** took over when the Roman Empire made Christianity their state religion. A-millennialism would actually be saying, since "a" means no, that those holding this view do not believe in any kind of thousand-year period of history involving God's people. This would not be correct. It is best to understand the term as "realized millennialism." The thousand years being seen as not literal, but as a representative symbol of a full and complete period of time encompassing the rest of the world's years: From the beginning of Christ's reign, Until He comes again in judgment.

The main text of Premillennialist is **Revelation 20:1-7** upon which the whole doctrine must stand. All we can know about the thousand-year reign is to be found here. What is really important is what it does not say. It does not mention the following components of this doctrine: the second coming of Christ, the bodily resurrection of the martyred saints, a rapture of the church which is transported from **1 Thessalonians 14:13-18**, a reign of Christ on earth from Jerusalem, the literal throne of David, it does not mention "us," all Christians reigning with Him, there is no mention of a Great Anti-Christ coming at the end of the world.

Premillennialism, either historic or dispensational, is one of the most dangerous doctrines out there because it denies the present reign of Christ over His kingdom (**Acts 2:32-36; 1 Corinthians 15:24-26**), it makes the first coming of Christ a failure, it makes the church a temporary Plan B and virtually unimportant, it makes the same mistake the Jews did in expecting an earthly kingdom when Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (**John 18:36-37**), and it gives false hope for a second chance after this life is over. In spite of its popularity, it is void of proof. God never promised an earthly reign of Christ. This same thousand-year period appears nowhere else in the 66 books of the Bible. It is not good to build a system of theology on a highly symbolic passage. James Eford wrote,

The only way one can find these ideas in this text is to import them – and that is not optional for anyone who is attempting to understand what the text originally said and meant. (**Revelation for Today**)

We must not take everything in **Revelation 20** literally. Too often people literalize what is clearly a figurative passage, and some of these people have made a whole system of theology on it. They make the 1,000 years in **Revelation 20:4-7** literal while admitting that the key, the chain with which Satan is bound, the bottomless pit, the dragon are symbolic. Premillennialist say the 1,000 years must be taken literally, but in order to come to that conclusion, they change the past tense into future tense: Lived to "shall live," reigned to "shall reign." They insist the reign of Christ will be done on earth from the Temple in Jerusalem. They also say all Christians will reign with Christ in His earthly reign. We have already shown that none of this theology can be found in Revelation or in any other part of the Bible.

What is revealed in **Revelation 19** and **20**? Satan is bound His former allies have been defeated and cast into the lake of fire (**19:19-20**). Now it is his turn (**20:10**).

The martyrs were the "they" who were beheaded in the Romans persecution are now reigning with Christ during the same 1,000 years period Satan is bound (**Revelation 6:9-11; 20:4-6**). "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection" (**v. 5**).

The phrase 'the first resurrection' has nothing to do with a bodily resurrection of the good at the beginning of an imagined literal thousand-year reign. Rather, in context this is the spiritual resurrection begun when a person is baptized into Christ and climaxed when he dies 'in the Lord' (**Revelation 14:13**). (**Roper**, pp. 326-327)

(See **Romans 6:1-7, 17-18; Ephesians 4:13-18**.) The main point in **Revelation 20** is that evil has and will be defeated. Satan is "bound" (restrained), and eventually cast into hell (**vs. 2, 10**).

It is very important for us to understand the thousand years. Dr. Stafford North asked and answered

Four questions about the thousand-year reign. Who reigns? Christ and the martyrs of the Roman persecution. Why do they reign? To celebrate the great victory? Where do they reign? In heaven. (**Unlocking Revelation**, p. 94).

Numbers are used symbolically in **Revelation**. The number 7, or its multiple, is a symbolic way of signifying "totality, completeness, or perfection." For example, the number 144,000 (Revelation 7 and 14) is a multiple of the number 7 indicating completeness or wholeness. The number 10, used 242 times in the Bible, is another of those symbolic numbers, also indicating completeness or perfection. Since numbers are used symbolically in **Revelation**, there is no reasonable interpretation that would make the 1,000 years in this text literal. There are several passages of Scripture where this number is not used literally (**Psalms 90:4; Ecclesiastes 6:6; 2 Peter 3:8**) and **Revelation 20:2-3-7** is another example.

If the thousand-years in the book of **Revelation** is not a literal period of history – the numeral 'thousand' is used more than 20 times in the book of Revelation, and not once is it employed in a literal sense. (**Revelation: Jesus Christ's Final Message of Hope**, p. 101).

John Temples wrote that "1,000 is a round indefinite number, and is in all likelihood, not literal." (**Pictures from Patmos: A Study of the Book of Revelation**). The binding of Satan seems to represent the vindication of the cause of Christ. The Church of Christ survived the bitter persecutions of the Roman Empire, ten in all, which was the worst ever brought against it. The church kingdom will survive any future persecutions that may come against it and it will never be destroyed. The thousand-year reign of Christ is not a literal 1,000 years, but a symbol of a long and complete reign that encompasses the rest of the world's years and is now in progress. As a descendant of Jeconiah (**Matthew 1:11**), He could not reign on earth from Jerusalem (**Jeremiah 22:30**).

David Roper wrote,

The thousand years is the time when Satan is bound and the Christian dead are alive and reigning — which is right now. The statement about the 'thousand years' being 'complete' must therefore refer to the end of

this age — when Christ will return, the dead will be raised, and everyone will be judged. (*ibid*, p. 327)

In his commentary on **Revelation**, John Temples wrote,

The book [**Revelation**] ends with a message of goodwill from Jesus: '[His] grace be with you all.' The Old Testament ends with a curse (**Malachi 4:1**); The New Testament ends with grace." [John adds **Three Final Lessons From Revelation**:] "God is sovereign and in control. His authority is absolute extending not only to our individual lives, but also — to the affairs and destinies of nations. God will judge evil. Even though evil may seem to triumph even for centuries — God's judgment is sure. The church will endure and triumph. (John's commentary is available online at [johntemples@hotmail.com](mailto:johntemples@hotmail.com))

— Dr. Sellers Crain, Jr, D.Min., April 27, 2021