

The Coming Kingdom - Part 13

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Because today's evangelical world believes that the church is experiencing the Messianic kingdom, we began a study chronicling what the Bible teaches about the kingdom. This earthly kingdom is anticipated in the office of Theocratic Administrator that was lost in Eden, in the biblical covenants, in the predictions of the Old Testament prophets, and in the earthly theocracy governing Israel from the time of Moses to Zedekiah. This theocratic arrangement terminated with the initiation of the "Times of the Gentiles" when the nation had no king reigning on David's Throne as Judah was trampled by various Gentile powers. Against that backdrop entered Jesus Christ, the rightful Heir to David's Throne. Had first-century Israel enthroned Christ, the earthly kingdom would have become a reality. Despite this unprecedented opportunity, Israel rejected the kingdom offer (Matt. 12) leading to the kingdom's postponement.

Due to this postponement, Christ explained the spiritual conditions that would prevail during the kingdom's absence. This interim program includes His revelation of the kingdom mysteries (Matt. 13) and the church (Matt. 16:18). Because neither the kingdom mysteries nor the church represent the fulfillment of God's Old Testament kingdom promises, the kingdom will remain in a state of abeyance as long as God's present work in the world continues through His interim program. However, one day the church's mission on the earth will be completed (Rom. 11:25b) resulting in the church's removal from the earth through the rapture. Then God, who is not forgetful of His prior unconditional covenants with Israel (Exod. 2:24; Ezek. 36:22), will re-extend the offer of the kingdom to national Israel in the midst of the coming Great Tribulation. Unlike at the First Advent (Matt. 23:37-38), this time the offer will be accepted leading to Christ's return (Matt. 24:30-31) and subsequent earthly kingdom (Matt. 25:34; Rev. 20:1-10). Revelation therefore explains how the world will eventually transition from the rule that Satan has had over the world ever since the Fall in Eden (Luke 4:5-8; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19) to the future time in history when God and His people "will reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:10b). Revelation 11:15 well captures this theme when it says, "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM

As mentioned in earlier installments, one of the significant purposes of the "Great Tribulation Period" is to bring Israel into a right relationship with her Messiah so that the Messianic kingdom can come to planet earth. As previously stated, unlike at the First Advent, this time the offer will be accepted leading to Christ's return (Matt. 23:37-39) and subsequent earthly reign (Matt. 25:34; Rev. 20:1-10). During this glorious one-thousand year era, everything that was promised in the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants will find a literal fulfillment when Christ will rule the world from David's Throne (Matt. 25:31) in Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16-18). This time period represents the restoration of the office of

Theocratic Administrator lost in Eden. God the Father will govern the last Adam, or God the Son, who in turn will govern the world on the Father's behalf.

Israel's covenants will find their fullest expression during this Age. All that God intended for the earthly theocracy of the Old Testament era will come to fruition not only for Israel, but also for the entire world. The Times of the Gentiles will be brought to an end as Israel will be head again over the nations (Isa. 14:1-2; 60:10, 12, 14, 16). All of the kingdom truths predicted by the Old Testament prophets will become a reality. All that Christ wanted to do for Israel at His first Advent (Matt. 23:37) will come to pass at the Second Advent (Matt. 24:31). With Satan bound during this period (Rev. 20:1-3), the earth will finally be exonerated from the long bondage it has suffered under since the Edenic Fall.

ONE THOUSAND YEARS MEANS ONE THOUSAND YEARS

The passage that typically comes to mind when discussing Christ's millennial reign is Revelation 20:1-10. As explained throughout this series, most of the information regarding the conditions of the millennial kingdom have already been anticipated and explained in prior Scripture, especially the Old Testament. Yet, Revelation 20:1-10 provides an important detail since it is the only passage that specifies the kingdom's duration of one-thousand years. Here, John makes six references to the kingdom's one-thousand year length. Many commentators attach little significance to the expression "thousand years" on the grounds that this number should be interpreted non-literally. Their thinking is that since Revelation is a symbolic book, the number "one thousand" should also be rendered non-literally. Postmillennialist Kenneth L. Gentry is typical among these allegorical commentators:

The proper understanding of the thousand year time frame in Revelation 20 is that it is representative of a long and glorious era and is not limited to a literal three hundred and sixty-five thousand days. This figure represents a perfect cube of ten which is the number of quantitative perfection.¹

Yet, there are valid textual reasons for taking the number "one thousand" literally. At least four come to mind. **First**, John knows how to use indefinite concepts when he wants to. In verse 8, John uses the simile "*like* the sand of the seashore" to describe the number of those involved in the final rebellion. Yet such a conspicuous figurative expression is absent in any of John's six uses of "thousand years." Moreover, John, in Revelation 20:3 says Satan will be released for "a short time" (*mikros chronos*). Had John wanted to indicate the Millennium will last "a long time" it would have been very easy for him to do so. In fact, other biblical writers use the expression "long time" (*polys chronos*). For example, Matthew employs it in order to depict the lengthy yet chronologically undefined period of time between Christ's advents (Matt. 25:19). Here, however, John does not employ this expression but instead provides a specific number.

¹ Kenneth L. Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd and rev. ed. (Tyler: TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997), 347.

Second, in the rest of the Greek New Testament, when a number is associated with the word “year” or “years,” this linguistic combination always refers to a literal duration of time. Why should the six-fold repetition of the thousand years found in Revelation 20:1-10 be the sole interpretive exception to this rule? **Third**, if the number “one thousand” here is not literal, how then do we interpret all of the other numbers in the Book of Revelation? What do we do with two witnesses (11:3), seven thousand people (11:13), four angels (7:1), seven angels (8:6), one hundred and forty-four thousand Jews (7:4), twelve thousand from each tribe (7:5-8), twenty-four elders (4:4), forty-two months (11:2), and one thousand two hundred and sixty days (11:3)?² Thus, not taking “thousand” literally in Revelation 20:1-10 casts suspicion upon every other number in the Apocalypse, thereby rendering them non-sensical and meaningless.

Fourth, while Revelation is a symbolic book, not everything in the book is a symbol. Generally, when the author wants us to take something symbolically he tells us so. For example, we do not take the woman in Revelation 17 literally, because the last verse in the chapter tells us that the woman represents a city (Rev. 17:18). Thus, an overt clue is given to alert the reader to the fact that a non-literal interpretation of the woman is intended. The same can be said of the dragon or the serpent, who is interpreted as Satan within the immediate context (Rev. 20:2). However, in Revelation 20, the number “one thousand” is listed over and over again with nothing in the text telling us that anything but a literal number is in view.

Sometimes, allegorical interpreters appeal to Psalm 50:10 as a justification for taking the number thousand in Revelation 20:1-10 non-literally.³ Psalm 50:10 says, “For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills.” The “logic” of the non-literalist is as follows: since this verse indicates that God owns everything, then “thousand” in this same passage is obviously a symbolic number. Certainly God owns the cattle on the thousand and first hill as well since He owns it all. Because “thousand” is non-literal in Psalm 50:10, it must also be non-literal in Revelation 20:1-10. However, not only does this argument ignore the four aforementioned reasons for taking “thousand” literally in Revelation 20:1-10, but it also ignores the reality of Hebrew poetry. Unlike the poetry that Westerners are accustomed to, Jewish poetry rhymed ideas rather than sounds. Therefore, the Jews employed parallelism in their poetry. Thus, both clauses in any given verse must be understood together or in harmony with one another. Psalm 50:10 represents an example of synonymous Hebrew parallelism where the first line restates the same idea found in the second line but in different words. In such a context, “thousand” is obviously symbolic and non-literal since it is restating the notion that every beast of the forest belongs to the Lord through the figurative use of “thousand.” In other words, we know that “thousand” in Psalm 50:10 is non-literal since the context, or synonymous Hebrew parallelism, demands it. However, there is no similar synonymous Hebrew parallelism in any of John's uses of “thousand” in Revelation 20:1-10. Rather, John simply uses the number “thousand” in a straight

² Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1991), 244-45.

³ Gentry, *He Shall Have Dominion*, 347; Hank Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2007), 127.

forward way. Thus, any attempt to symbolize "thousand" in Revelation 20:1-10 on the basis of the same term's symbolic expression in Psalm 50:10 is tantamount to mixing apples and oranges. The genre, or category of literature, in Psalm 50:10 is completely different from the genre of Revelation 20:1-10.

In sum, although most of the information concerning the Millennium's conditions are already revealed in prior Scripture, Revelation 20:1-10 provides the kingdom's one thousand year duration, and it is best to understand this number in its normal sense.

(To Be Continued...)



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