

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FROM DR. JACK VAN IMPE

Revelation 20: 1 - 6

Chapter 20 introduces us to the most beautiful, peaceful, and rewarding age this world will ever know-the Millennium, or the one-thousand-year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ as *KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. He will sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end* (Isaiah 9:6,7).

Before beginning our study of this chapter, may I take a moment to refute the reasoning of critics who deny this doctrinal truth? Those who oppose the teaching of a literal one-thousand-year reign of Christ upon earth are in direct opposition to the Word of God! Their claim that the doctrine is dangerously built on a single chapter of the Bible proves that they are not good students of God's Holy Word, for many passages both teach and reflect this truth. Let's investigate.

First of all, if Israel has no future, dozens of Old Testament prophecies immediately go down the drain. For example, Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, with all of their benedictions upon the people of Israel, must be scrapped if there is no place upon earth where they find fulfillment. To spiritualize or allegorize the literal truths concerning Israel's future is to be willfully blinded. I have spent thousands of hours in God's Book and could never honestly or intellectually arrive at such a conclusion.

Secondly, there must be a Millennium, or scores of verses become hollow platitudes of meaningless predictions. Consider the following texts-they could never depict heaven because they occur on earth. If so, there must be a time and place for their fulfillment, because none of them has yet occurred.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb (as nature is tamed) (Isaiah 11:6).

But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid (Micah 4:4).

Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness (Isaiah 32:1).

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed. . .and it shall stand for ever (Daniel 2:44).

The Lord...shall suddenly come to his temple (Malachi 3:1).

Ezekiel describes this Temple, built and located upon the earth (see chapters 40 through 48). Israel will be the head-not the tail-of the nations in that day (see Zechariah 8:23).

And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them (Isaiah 65:21).

The Lord Jesus Christ referred to the period of time during which these events take place as the regeneration. *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).* Likewise, Peter declared, *And [God] shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:20,21).*

The word *restitution* means "a reconstitute" and is similar to the regeneration of Matthew 19:28. In addition, Paul stated in Ephesians 1:21 that there is an age *which is to come*. This same age is called *the dispensation of the fulness of times* (Ephesians 1:10). Again these terms refer to the rule of Christ and His people over the earth-not angels, as the spiritualizers would have us believe. Angels ruling the earth is an impossibility, *for unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come (Hebrews 2:5).* Instead, *the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men (Daniel 4:17).* The title, *the most High [God], or the most High* is Christ's millennial title throughout the Psalms, the Book of Daniel, and the Book of Hosea. The *most High [God]* will also bear the title *King of Israel* in that day (John 1:49). All upon earth will obey Him for *[He] shalt break them with a rod of iron (Psalm 2:9).* The result: *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power (Psalm 110:3).* Earth's inhabitants will love the Lord Jesus so much during the kingdom age that *daily shall he be praised (Psalm 72:15).* Yes, *His name shall endure forever (Psalm 72:17).*

The center of all this kingdom activity is Jerusalem, not heaven's golden shores. Proof? *Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion (Psalm 2:6).* *Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3).* *[They] shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:13).* *And the Redeemer shall come to Zion (Isaiah 59:20).* *The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem (Joel 3:16).* *Thus saith the Lord.. I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem (Zechariah 8:3).* *Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem (Zechariah 8:22).*

The preceding evidence is proof enough! Only the spiritually blind can deny the fact of a literal Millennium. Only the willfully ignorant can claim that the teaching is based on just one chapter of the Bible. Our brief review has but touched the hem of the garment concerning millennial truth. Believe God, not men. Now, since *mille* means "thousand" and *annum* means "years," let's beg in our study of chapter 20 which presents the *mille annum*, Millennium, or the one-thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth.

Verse 1: *And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.*

Verse 2: *And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,*

Verse 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.*

What a victorious sight John now sees—an angel coming from heaven with a key and a chain in his hand for the purpose of opening the bottomless pit and binding Satan for one thousand years. Some scholars believe the angel to be Christ himself because he has the keys of hell and death (chapter 1, verse 18). This is a distinct possibility. However, one who possesses keys often loans them to another when help is needed. Thus, the angel might be Michael, the archangel. The important observation here is that Christ's ownership of the keys—which open the pit of the abyss for Satan—is by virtue of His completed work upon Calvary's cross. Remember His statement in verse 18 of chapter 1: *I am he that liveth, and was dead; [Calvary]; and, behold, I am alive for evermore [the Resurrection], Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*

The chain carried by the angel is used to bind the villain of the ages—called *the dragon, that old serpent...the Devil, and Satan*—for 1,000 years. What horrid titles the evil one bears! *Dragon*, in Hebrew, pictures a hideous monster. The term *old serpent* portrays the slithering snake who brought ruination upon the entire human race through his deceitful work in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:1-6). *Satan* means "slander," for he is *the accuser of [the] brethren* as we learned in chapter 12, verse 10, and he is also the father of slanderers and gossips (see John 8:44). *Devil* means "adversary" or "foe," and surely Satan has been a foe of Christ and His followers until this present moment in our text. Now, at last, he is cast into the *bottomless pit*, shut up and sealed for a Millennium (verse 3).

The *bottomless pit* is not the *lake of fire* into which the beast and false prophet were cast in chapter 19, verse 20. Rather, it is a temporary prison where Satan is incarcerated for ten centuries in order that peace, prosperity, happiness, and holiness may exist on earth during Christ's millennial reign.

At the end of this time, he is *loosed* [for] *a little season*, leads one final revolt against God, and is subsequently cast into the eternal *lake of fire*. . .*where the beast and the false prophet are* (chapter 20, verse 10).

Verse 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.*

John now observes thrones occupied for judgment. Who sits upon them? Members of the first resurrection-which includes the Old Testament saints, Church Age saints, and Tribulation saints. The resurrection of the Old Testament believers is described in Daniel 12:1 and 2, and the resurrection of New Testament saints in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:15-54. As we have seen, the resurrection of the martyred Tribulation saints undoubtedly occurs at the *glorious appearing of Christ* (Titus 2:13) when He returns to earth. Chapter 6, verses 9 through 11, presented this view. At that point these martyrs awaited their resurrection but were told to wait *yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled*.

Thus, we see that the thrones are occupied by resurrected believers from Adam onward, inclusive of the last Tribulation martyrs. Each has been a participant in the first resurrection. These saints are entitled to sit upon thrones because they are members of the *royal priesthood* (1 Peter 2:9). Christ has made them *kings and priests* (chapter 5, verse 10).

Verse 5: *But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*

The closing sentence of this verse, *This is the first resurrection*, should have been the conclusion of verse 4. The transition from verse 4 to verse 5 would then be: *And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. [This is the first resurrection.] But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.* This clarifies the issue. The dead of verse 5-raised a thousand years later-could not be part of the first resurrection (those of verse 4)-because...

Verse 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.*

Since the remaining dead come forth one thousand years later, we immediately understand that they cannot be part of the first resurrection. Those who take part in the first resurrection reign with Christ during the Millennium, while the members of this group remain in their graves. They, in turn, are raised for the Great White Throne Judgment after the 1,000 years.