



The REFLECTOR

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Revelation 20:4-6 - The Reign of the Saints

• by Jerry F. Bassett

The doctrine of premillennialism has leaned heavily upon Revelation 20 to prove its ungodly tenets. Briefly stated, premillennialism denies that the kingdom of Christ was established by His first coming, and that He now reigns with all authority upon the promised throne of David. The fulfillment of these promises supposedly looks forward to His second coming at which time, it is said, He will vanquish His foes, establish His kingdom for a millennium of righteousness upon this earth, while He reigns, accompanied by the saints, upon David's literal throne in Jerusalem.

Because of this doctrine, and its attempts to use Revelation 20 for proof, the chapter has been approached almost totally from a negative point of view, i.e., from the standpoint that it does not teach what premillennialists say it teaches. Such an approach is necessary in dealing with this insidious doctrine, and is not being criticized here. We do point out, however, that this gives only part of the picture. It is like trying to describe the beauty of a building by telling someone what it does not look like. A sufficient description requires also a positive approach, an attempt to tell what the building does look like. Likewise, Revelation 20 needs more than enough study to show what it does not teach, we need to try to understand also what it does teach. This three-part series of articles is an attempt at this goal.

A previous article dealing with verses 1-3, and entitled *The Triumphant Christ*, showed that: (1) Christ is the angel of verse 1; (2) that He has bound Satan by the power of the gospel represented by the symbol of a thousand

years; and (3) that man is safe from Satan's deceit by abiding in the gospel, but that Satan has "a little season" as contrasted to Christ's "thousand years" so that Satan is able to deceive the man who fails to abide in the reign of Christ.

Now we turn attention to verses 4-6.

The Saints Live and Reign With Christ, 4

Revelation 6:9-10 pictures saints who were slain and under the altar; a picture of persecution unto death upon the altar of service to the Lord. They cry out to God for justice asking how long will He withhold judgment and vengeance. Can it be that those who have died for their faith have in reality been defeated by Satan?

No, they are not defeated. These who have suffered at the hands of the enemy of the Lord live and reign with Him in His great victory and power. In persecution they are under the altar, but in the eyes of the Lord they sit upon thrones (20:4). Further, judgment is given unto them, those who persecute them must face the just wrath of the Lord (6:10-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). The saints may suffer greatly in this life, but at the same time, and forever, they live and reign with Christ (20:4).

The Saints Live and Reign With Christ A Thousand Years, 4

In the first article, the idea was presented that the thousand year reign of Christ is not a reference to time at all, but instead a symbol of the greatness of His power, ten times ten times ten. It symbolizes the absoluteness of His

victory over Satan and of the immutability of His promise of victory, or salvation, to those who obey Him. It is His incomparable power achieved through His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father in heaven; "all authority . . . in heaven and on earth . . ." (Matthew 28:18). ". . . far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named . . ." (Ephesians 1:21). It is His power in the gospel to save men (Romans 1:4, 16-17).

Those who submit to the gospel of Christ therefore live and reign with Him in it. It is significant that the saint's reign with Christ is connected with his living with Christ (20:4). Thus, one reigns with Christ when (at the same time) he lives with Him. But the saint lives with Christ while he abides in the gospel; he is ". . . dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). As long, therefore, as he abides in Christ (in the gospel of Christ) he lives with Him, and as he lives with Christ he also reigns with Him over all of Satan's efforts to destroy him, including death itself. Those ". . . who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17).

This Is The First Resurrection, 5

The expression "first resurrection" does not, and cannot, imply two bodily resurrections, one for the righteous at the beginning of a millennium and a second for the wicked at its end. The Scriptures are not clearer on any point than on the fact that there will be one bodily resurrection for all; ". . . an

hour is coming, in which all that are in the tombs . . . shall come forth . . . those who did the good . . . those who committed the evil . . ." (John 5:28-29), "... a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked" (Acts 24:15). To make "first resurrection" refer to the first of two bodily resurrections is, therefore, to contradict these plain Scriptural statements.

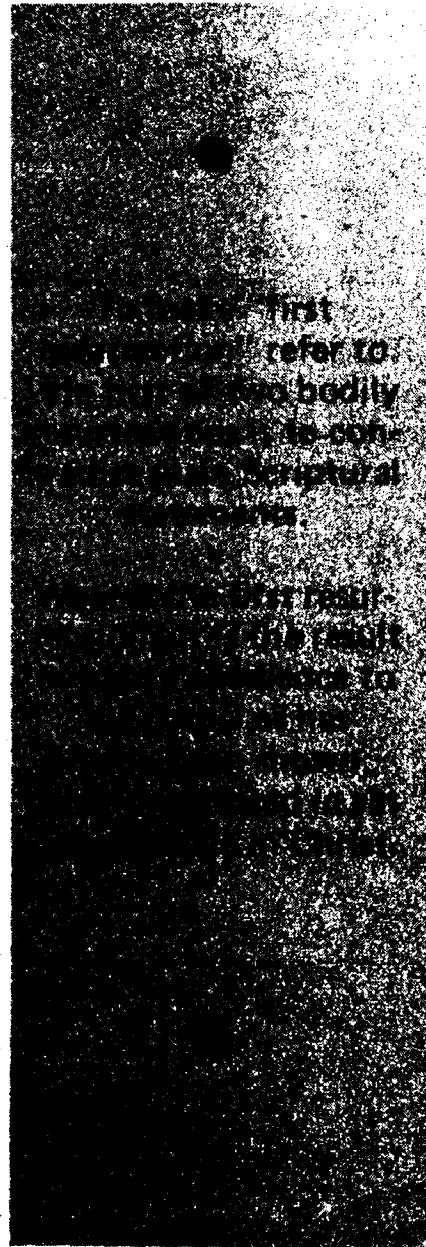
What is the first resurrection? By relating verse 5 to verse 4 it is seen that the first resurrection is what has made it possible for the saints to live and reign with Christ; they live with Him because they have been resurrected. But what enables one to live and reign with Christ is his obedience to the gospel as has already been shown; he who was dead in sin is made alive in Christ. The first resurrection is, therefore, the result of man's obedience to the gospel of Christ; dating from Jesus' first coming, the dead who hear His words live (John 5:24-25). This has to refer to a spiritual resurrection since those who have heard Him have not to this time been resurrected bodily. The Ephesians had been dead in sin, but were made alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1). The same was said of the Colossians (2:13). And in this same sense Paul could say that the salvation of unbelieving Jews would constitute resurrection, or life, from the dead (Romans 11:15). The first resurrection, then, is simply the regeneration of men by the gospel. They are the ones who, in the power of the gospel, live and reign with Christ.

"But," someone may say, "the text says, 'The rest of the dead did not come to life (lived not again, KJV) until the thousand years were completed.' If you say that the resurrection refers to regeneration by the gospel, then would this not have to mean that those who do not obey it are going to eventually live with Christ anyway?"

Admittedly, this is a difficulty in the application we are here making of the symbols in Revelation 20. It is well to remember that symbolism may lend itself to variant applications, all of which are worthy of consideration as long as they harmonize with what the Scriptures say elsewhere in plain, non-figurative language. Certainly, dogmatism ill-behooves the expositor of the Revelation.

However, the objection noted above is not insurmountable to the applica-

tion made of Revelation 20 thus far, because the word "until" does not necessarily imply a change in status, condition, or relationship at the termination of the existing circumstances. For example, from the same Greek word translated "until" in verse 5 Paul told Timothy to give attention to reading, exhortation, and teaching until (or till) he, Paul, came (1 Timothy 4:13). Paul most certainly did not imply a



change was to take place in Timothy's relationship to this responsibility after Paul's coming. So also with the dead of Revelation 20:4-5 who do not take part in the first resurrection. There is nothing in this language which necessarily requires that the condition of the disobedient will be changed from death to life after those who have had part in the first resurrection have been saved.

Blessed and Holy Is The One Who Has Part In The First Resurrection, 46

Such a person is blessed because his resurrection from spiritual death by the gospel, and his abiding in it, removes him from subjection to the second death which is the eternal punishment of the wicked (20:6, 14-15, 21:8). Jesus said, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Again He said, "... if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (John 8:51). This is the one who, having obeyed the teaching of the apostles of Christ, is made free from sin and becomes a servant to righteousness, and his obedient service bears fruit unto eternal life (Romans 6:11, 17-18, 21-22). Truly, over such a person the second death has no power.

He is blessed also in that having part in the first resurrection (regeneration by the gospel) he is made a priest of God and of Christ (20:6). He is a priest, one who is able to offer sacrifice, by being cleansed in the blood of Christ (1:5-6) and being thus enabled he offers spiritual sacrifices by Christ Jesus which are pleasing to the Father (1 Peter 2:5). Note also that since one's priesthood is the result of his having part in the first resurrection, and since his being a priest is attributed to his being in Christ by the cleansing of the gospel, it is again seen that the first resurrection is simply a symbolical expression for one's regeneration effected by obedience to the gospel.

And, finally, he is blessed because he lives and reigns with Christ for a thousand years (20:6). At this point it is worthy of note that this text connects the saint's living and reigning with Christ with his being a priest, and since he is a priest now in the gospel, it follows that his living and reigning is the life and victory he enjoys by the power of the gospel; a blessing he has from the moment he obeys the gospel, and as long as he abides in it (Romans 6:11-22).

Thus, we live and reign with Christ, and are priests of God and Christ, and are not subject to the second death through participation in the first resurrection; our obedience to the gospel and the faithful service it requires.

Blessed are we, indeed, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"God Leads A Pretty Sheltered Life"

• *by Cam Bandy*

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Some of the groups near the front talked heatedly — not with cringing shame, but with belligerence.

"How can God judge us? How can he know about suffering?", snapped a joking brunette. She jerked back a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror, beatings, torture, death!"

In another group, a black man lowered his collar. "What about this," he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn, "lynched for no crime but being black! We have suffocated in slave ships, been wrenched from loved ones, toiled till only death gave release."

Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering in the world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping, no fear, no hunger, no hatred. Indeed, what did God know about what man had been forced to endure in this world? "After all, God leads a pretty sheltered life," they said.

So each group sent out a leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. There was a Jew, a Black, an untouchable from India, an illegitimate, a person from Hiroshima, and one from a Siberian slave camp. In the center of the plain they were ready to present their case. It was rather simple: Before God would be qualified to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth — as a man!

But they set certain safeguards to insure his experiencing the worst of life on earth:

¶ Let him be born a Jew.

¶ Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted, so that none will know who is really his father.

¶ Let him champion a cause so just, but so radical that it brings down upon him the hate, condemnation, and eliminating efforts of every major traditional and established religious authority.

¶ Let him try to describe what no man has ever seen, tasted, heard, or smelled . . . let him try to communicate God to men.

¶ Let him be betrayed by his dearest friends.

¶ Let him be indicted on false charges, tried before a prejudiced jury, and convicted by a cowardly judge.

¶ Let him see what it is to be terribly alone and completely abandoned by every living thing.

¶ Let him be tortured and then let him die! Let him die the most humiliating death — with common thieves.

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the great throng of people. When the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was long silence. No one moved. For suddenly all knew — God had already served this sentence. He had the right to judge (John 5:25).

— via Danville Road Forum, Decatur, Alabama

Some Basic Issues

• by Charles L. Morton

That there are problems in religion is evident. Many involve issues that are basic and fundamental with regard to fellowship between man and God. Some of these issues were stated by Christ when He said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Certain things are inherent in this statement which deserve serious attention.

1. When Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven . . ." He declared emphatically that not everyone is going to be saved. In fact, He had just finished saying, "... wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat . . ." (Matt. 7:13-14). He then proceeds to say, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast our 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" (Matt. 7:22-23). In the parable of the virgins, the foolish are described as saying, "Lord, Lord . . ." only to be confronted with the fearful answer from the Bridegroom, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (Matt. 25:1-13). Yet, the idea continues to permeate our generation that "We're all going to the same place!" Verily, it is a basic issue that accountable people outside of Christ are lost.

2. When Jesus said that the one who shall enter into the kingdom of heaven is "he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven," He declared emphatically that the Father has a will (Eph. 3:10-11) which has been completely revealed to man (1 Cor. 2:7-13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17) and to which man is accountable (John 12:48; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). Human emotions and feelings are not to be trusted in religious matters (Prov. 14:12; Jer. 10:23). Human wisdom is faulty (1 Cor. 1:18-26) and human creeds are inherently evil (Matt. 15:6-9). Yet, people persist in declaring that "It doesn't

make any difference what we believe!" Verily, it is a basic issue that, apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ, people are lost in sin (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

3. When Jesus said that the one who is saved is "he that doeth the will of my Father," He forcefully emphasized two things: (1) Salvation requires positive, deliberate obedience, and (2) the nature of obedience requires the *intelligent choice* of man. It is said, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). Again, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26). In spite of this, one of the most prevailing doctrines of today is "salvation by faith only." Verily, it is a basic issue that one must *do* the will of the Father to be saved.

4. Furthermore, it is insisted that one cannot *do* the will of the Father, unless he *knows* the will of the Father. Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth,

and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32), and Paul wrote, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Yet, in spite of this, the sentiment is constantly expressed that "We cannot understand the Bible." Verily, it is a basic issue that an intelligent understanding of God's law of pardon is a condition of salvation from alien sin (Heb. 8:8-12), and it is just as basic that intelligent understanding is essential to the growth and development of the child of God (1 Pet. 2:1-2; Heb. 5:12-14).

When the Lord spoke of entering the kingdom of heaven by "doing the will of my Father which is in heaven," it must surely be recognized that He affirmed the need for an attitude of reverence, respect and regard for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. May God help us all to learn the lesson. ①

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