

Does Revelation 20 Teach That There Will Be An Earthly Millennium?

<p> Revelation 20 commences with the words, 'And I saw.' These are words regularly used by John when he is commencing a new vision (e.g. 10.1). Thus we are not necessarily to see this chapter as following on chronologically from the previous chapter.

<p> Indeed a little thought will reveal that this cannot be so for an examination of chapter 20 soon reveals that it is a recapitulation of what has occurred in previous visions. The binding of Satan and casting of him into a bottomless pit clearly precedes his release from the bottomless pit in 9.1-11, compare 17.8. His being let loose for a little season is previously described in 17.10, which is before the second coming of Christ. Here in chapter 20 therefore Christ's coming occurs *after* 'the thousand years', a phrase which is in fact a feature of the passage. 'The thousand years' occurs BEFORE the final loosing of Satan, and that precedes Christ's coming.

<p> A further thing to be noted is that nowhere is there any mention in Revelation 20 of a reign ON EARTH. The reign that we read of is in Heaven by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who began to reign there immediately after His resurrection (Acts 2.36; Matthew 28.18; Hebrews 1.3; Revelation 3.21). And reigning with Him are those who have died because of their resistance to evil. Thus the teaching of this chapter is that our Lord Jesus Christ will reign with the martyred saints who have risen, along with all who had rejected worship of the Beast, who are seated with Him in Heaven. We repeat, there is no mention at all of a reign on earth.

<p> But what of 'the thousand years'? The truth is that whenever 'a thousand' is used in Scripture it is always as a generalisation. God owns the cattle on 'a thousand' hills (Psalm 50.10). God keeps covenant and mercy with those who love Him to 'a thousand' generations (Deuteronomy 7.9). His covenant is the word which He commanded to 'a thousand' generations (Psalm 105.8). In all these cases 'a thousand' is not intended to be taken literally but as signifying a generally large number. It would be ridiculous in each case to impose a literal restriction to a thousand. The same therefore applies to the 'thousand years' in Revelation 20. It indicates a long but not otherwise defined period. And that is certainly how Peter used the term in 2 Peter 3.8.

<p> But someone will ask - what about the first resurrection? When does that take place? The answer to this question is very straightforward. The first resurrection for Old Testament saints took place after Christ's resurrection (Matthew 27.53). The first resurrection for living Christians takes place when that person becomes a believer. In the words of Paul in Ephesians 2.6 we are 'made alive and raised with Christ and made to sit with Him in the heavenly places'. For 'as Christ was raised by the glory of the Father, so we also walk in newness of life' (Romans 6.4). Thereby we have experienced 'the power of His resurrection' (Philippians 3.10). We are 'transported from under the tyranny of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son' (Colossians 1.13). Jesus put it this way. 'He who hears my word and believes in Him Who sent me has eternal life, and will not come into condemnation but is passed from death to life' (John 5.24). On death this first resurrection results in the believer 'departing and being with Christ which is far better' (Philippians 1.23). Thus included in the first resurrection is the idea that those who die in Christ are made alive and go into His presence, as with the martyrs in Revelation 20, and as with the people in Revelation 6.1-11; 7.9-17. Such people are out of reach of the second death, the death of the soul. The second resurrection will, of course, take place at Christ's coming, when we receive our risen or transformed bodies.

<p> So chapter 20 is talking of Christ's triumphant reign in Heaven along with His own who have died, which will be taking place even while events are going forward on earth prior to His coming as described in previous chapters.