

The Book Of Revelation

*3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy,
and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.
(Revelation 1:3. NRSV)*

*5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'
Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'
(Revelation 21:5. NRSV)*

Message 14

Revelation 20
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Introduction:

N.B. Due to the nature of tonight's presentation, the written manuscript will be less helpful than in nights previous. The audio from the website, accompanied by the few PDF charts will be more useful.

Good evening! Tonight we are concluding our study of what is generally held to be the 6th series of visions, that of Christ's final triumph over his enemies. As mentioned last week we are entering into a section of text where Evangelicals tend to divide rather dramatically. As such we have to deal with the various interpretive grids before we deal with the text so that we can appreciate the various positions and evaluate them from within the text. While there are a few other derivations, we will content ourselves to the three main views still operating within the Protestant tradition. There was a time when the view known as Post-Millennialism was quite popular, mostly in Europe and America at the close of the 19th century and mostly due to the historic triumph of technology and civilisation over disease and national conflict. The prevailing sense was that the power of the Gospel had effectively established a utopian kingdom on the earth and that things would carry on quite blessedly under the power of Gospel Enlightened culture until, the point having proven, Christ would return. However, the outbreak of two world wars with a fairly devastating depression stuck in there, more or less consigned this viewpoint to the trash can of history. As such we will not bother to go through it in any detail. Curiously I

recently became aware that there is a fringe group of Pentecostals who are preaching a new version of Post-Millennialism suggesting that some powerful second outpouring of the Holy Spirit will usher in a utopian kingdom which will last for a thousand years, bring the world under its sway and then Christ will return for his final and eternal reign. This appears to be morphing in with another Pentecostal fringe movement known as “Dominion Theology”. However, this is so new that no one has written a credible book on it so we will have to wait to see if it takes root and produces something we can evaluate. For now, we will restrain ourselves to a discussion of the three main Protestant viewpoints. (We will do this by going through the comparison charts and thus the manuscript from this point on until the walk through of the text will be unhelpful).

Summary Conclusion:

In the final analysis I suspect that Pretribulational/Dispensational PreMillennialism will be eventually regarded as a rather devastating 20th century heresy. Alister McGrath suggests that the proper definition of heresy is as follows:

“Heresy represents certain ways of formulating the core themes of the Christian faith – ways that are sooner or later recognized by the church to be **dangerously inadequate or even destructive**. What one generation welcomes as orthodoxy another may eventually discover to be heretical.”

- Alister McGrath, Heresy (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), p12.

I think this third view rather neatly fits that definition. It was briefly understood as orthodox; it enjoyed majority status among American Evangelicals for probably three decades, though it never gained a foothold in most other parts of the world. Ultimately however, under scrutiny it was found both inadequate and even destructive. It is inadequate in that it simply doesn't fit with the over all pattern and clear teaching of Scripture. It does damage to the texts from which it seeks to derive support and relies upon a separation between the concepts of Israel and the church that is at complete odds with one of the majority emphases of the New Testament. As when trying to put a puzzle together, if the piece requires trimming and reshaping and recoloring; it probably doesn't fit and one should simply go back into the box in search of other options. In the end, I think we shall agree that it is rather like the historic version of Post-Millennialism: it was a product of its time revealed as such by the progression of history. PT/DPM is really just the projection of American Exceptionalism onto the pages of Holy Scripture. "God loves us too much to allow us to suffer". It began with that presupposition and rearranged the puzzle pieces in order to accommodate it. It didn't work and America is beginning to suffer and so it seems much less attractive even before we deal with its Biblical awkwardness.

In addition to it being inadequate it is also potential quite destructive. It has stimulated a very unhealthy "escapism" in today's Evangelical. The prayer of today's Christian is too often: "Lord get me the hell out of here!" Rather than, as it should be: "Lord use me to get the hell out of here in Jesus' Name and by the power of the Gospel". Additionally it leans perilously close to racism. PT/DPMers agree that the tribulation will be a time of unprecedented Gospel harvest, even though it is simultaneously a terribly costly time to share witness. Instead of being eager to serve the Lord of the Harvest, the cry of the PT/DPMers is "Let the Jews do it!" "We'll witness in the easy times, but when the knives come out, let the Jews do it!" In addition to being unbiblical, it comes dangerously close to being racist.

In the final analysis, these are the reasons that PT/DPM is fading quickly off the Evangelical landscape. What we have left, is basically what we had before it came, a two horse race between Amillennialism and Historic PreMillennialism. I prefer Historic PreMillennialism because I think it handles the most texts the most effectively which, I think at the end of the day, is how we should decide true from ultimately false. However, Amillennialism is a perfectly legitimate viewpoint and is entirely welcome in this church. Historically, this church has been Historic PreMillennial, as has our denomination for the most part, though there have been many Baptist

Amillennialists also. There has only been one pastor here, that I can discover, and that an Associate Pastor, who has ever held to the PT/DPM viewpoint. If you are more persuaded by Amillennialism, that's fine, pray about that, study the Scriptures, we're still friends. If you are still persuaded by PT/DPM we won't kick you out of the church but you may not like it here. You want to get the hell out of Orillia and so do we but we mean TWO ENTIRELY DIFFERENT THINGS by that and you may find that frustrating. Very well, let's use the interpretive grid of Historic PreMillennialism as we begin to read and TEST THAT by walking through the text of Revelation 20.

Evaluation of the Text:

Open your Bibles to Revelation 20:1 and we will go through the text dividing it briefly as we go:

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

Obviously this is symbolic language, the devil is a spirit and therefore a literal chain would do no good. This represents strict limitations being placed upon him. We are used to seeing the devil as a dog on a chain. Whenever he is permitted to do something we are told: "It was given to him to do such and such". We have watched Satan fall from heaven to earth in Revelation 12 and now he falls further still from the earth to the pit of the Abyss.

²He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;
³and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

All parties seem to generally agree that the thousand years here may be a symbolic number. Whether you think the Millennium is the church age or a future utopian reign of Christ on the earth, you may still concede the likelihood of this being a symbol for a rather long time. It may in fact be exactly 1000 years but that fact is crucial to no one's theory. The critical issue to determine is the nature of the devil's confinement. The Amillennialists see this as very partial. The devil is bound only in that he may not deceive the nations wholesale so as to destroy the church and stamp out the Gospel. Therefore they say this happened as soon as the Gospel began to be preached in the time of Jesus. The devil was then cast down into the Abyss, but we have already talked about how this does not handle well the many passages that speak about the devil continuing to exercise deception upon the earth and it makes all of what we have just read in

chapters 13-19 very hard to understand. Besides that, this passage seems to speak of a very severe, indeed TOTAL binding and hiding away of Satan. He is bound with a chain, cast into a deep pit, a seal is placed over him. This sounds as if his influence is ENTIRELY REMOVED from the earth. This then MUST BE FUTURE because that is certainly not true now. So this is best understood as a future, TOTAL binding of the devil. After a while he must be released.

Why? The primary objection to the PreMillennial position is just this very thing. Why must the devil be released after the Millennial rule? What purpose would that serve and how could he possibly deceive people who have observed 1000 years of Christ's rule? We must remember that in the Bible the devil does not create sin, he reveals it by testing. Sin or faith are often indistinguishable until tested. God KNEW Job would pass the test because he knew of his faith. The tests he permitted the devil did not do anything other than to reveal that Job WAS in fact a man of faith. Likewise when an apparent believer falls away under trial it only reveals that he was never truly saved in the first place. Thus, if people are to be saved under the Millennial rule as numerous passages indicate, how will their faith be revealed but by testing? Likewise it is a foolish argument to say that people could not HELP but have faith when faced with Jesus in the flesh, because we know that many people saw Jesus in the flesh, witnessed his earthly miracles and still did not believe! Thus the objection is seen to be without merit.

⁴And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for ^fa thousand years.

⁵But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection.

So here we have the coming to life – the RESURRECTION of martyrs, the witnesses, those who did not worship the beast and they reign with Jesus for a thousand years. The rest of the dead, meaning unbelievers, those who DID worship the beast, they are not resurrected until after the thousand years. This is the first resurrection.

⁶Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

We recall that this was the promise stated in Revelation 1:

To Him who ^floved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, ⁶and has made us ^fkings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 1:5-6. NKJV)

When we are saved by Christ we are made kings and priests and we begin to serve in that capacity even now in the church age, but here we see this perfectly and ultimately in the Millennial Age.

⁷Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison
⁸and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea.

This imagery is drawn from Ezekiel 38, in fact the final four chapters of Revelation draw heavily upon the closing chapters of Ezekiel. In the closing chapters of Ezekiel you have a great renewal, then a final battle, followed by a vision of an eternal and blessed kingdom. That is exactly what you see in Revelation. A renewal, a last battle and an eternal blessed kingdom and much of the imagery for these depictions is borrowed wholesale from Ezekiel. It is also helpful to remember that in Jewish Apocalyptic literature, Gog and Magog, Gog being the person and Magog the place, often stand for the forces of evil collectively. It is very clear that John is not forecasting a literal replaying of the Battle of Gog and Magog because in Ezekiel this represents an invasion from the north but here in Revelation it represents an invasion from the four corner of the earth. This is a symbolic way of saying that the rebellious people from the four corners of the earth – the totality of humankind in opposition to God, rise up in one final flare to oppose God and his people. The devil has not MADE them sinners, he has revealed them as sinners.

⁹They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

¹⁰The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where^f the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

This then completes the picture of Christ's Final Triumph over his various enemies. We have seen the downfall of the Whore, the downfall of the Beast and the False Prophet and now we see the final downfall of the Accuser, the Satan, that ancient Serpent of old.

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

¹²And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before^f God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

¹³The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

This is the resurrection of the unsaved. All people, saved and unsaved will face judgement. It is a time when works are evaluated. This is not to say that people are saved by works, the saved

and unsaved have long ago been distinguished from one another, it is to say that saved people are rewarded for their good works and unsaved people are proven as having lacked faith by the absence of appropriate works and assigned commensurate punishment on the basis of their false deeds. This of course is what we saw in the parable of the sheep and the goats. Before the judgement of Jesus they were already either sheep or goats but they were consigned based on observable and provable works. Morris provides a helpful footnote here quoting Mounce as saying:

The issue is not salvation by works but works as the irrefutable evidence of a man's actual relationship with God. (Morris, p.234)

Long before works are reviewed, a person has their name either written in the Book of Life, or not.

¹⁴Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

¹⁵And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:1-15. NKJV)

This is the final state for unbelievers. Let's end there and take some questions.

N.B. Homework for next week: read Isaiah 65-66 and Ezekiel 40-48