

The Rest of the Story

Keys That Unlock The Revelation

More Than Conquerors, pp. 16-50

CD #1

1. The Book Of Revelation Consists Of Seven Parallel Sections, Which Span The Time From The First Coming To The Second Coming Of Christ.
2. The First Three Sections (Ch.1-11) Reveal The Conflict Between The Church And The World, With The Persecuted Church Being Avenged, Protected And Victorious. The Last Four Sections (Ch.12-22) Reveal The Same Events Viewed From A Backstage Perspective, With The Dragon Warring Against Christ And His Church Who Remain Victorious.
3. The Seven Sections Are Arranged With Each Section Emphasizing A Different Reality And Done So In A Progressive Climactic Order (i.e. The New Heaven And Earth Are More Fully Described In The Final Section Than In The Six Which Precede It).
4. Symbolic Pictures Are Used Throughout The Book To Convey Deeper Realities Than Mere Words Can Describe. Details That Pertain To These Pictures Should Always Be Interpreted In Harmony With The Central Thought, Focusing On The Prominent Idea, Never On The Details Themselves.
5. The Various Symbols That Are Used (i.e. Seals, Trumpets, Bowls Of Wrath, etc.) Do Not Refer To Specific Singular Events In History, But Rather To Human Conduct And Divine Dealings Operating Throughout The History Of The Church.
6. Revelation is rooted in Contemporaneous Events And Circumstances And Therefore, As All Books Of The Bible, Must Be Interpreted In Light Of The Conditions Prevailing When The Book Was Written.
7. The Revelation Is Rooted In The Scriptures And Must Be Interpreted In Light Of The Entire Bible.

8. The “Last Days” Are To Be Viewed As Beginning At The Resurrection And Ascension Of Christ With Only One Future Coming Of Christ (And That Taking Place At The Same Time As The Rapture And Final Judgment).

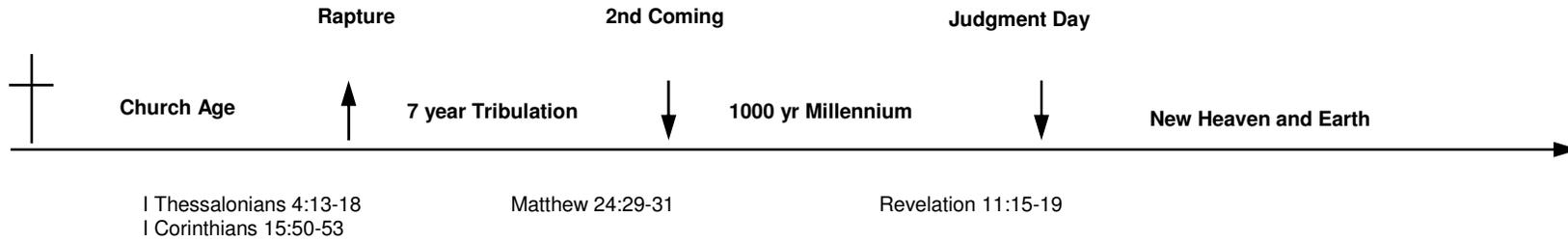
CD #2

9. The Millennium Is To Be Understood As The Period Of Time Between The Resurrection, Ascension, And Seating Of Christ And The Return Of Christ At The End Of The World.

CD #3

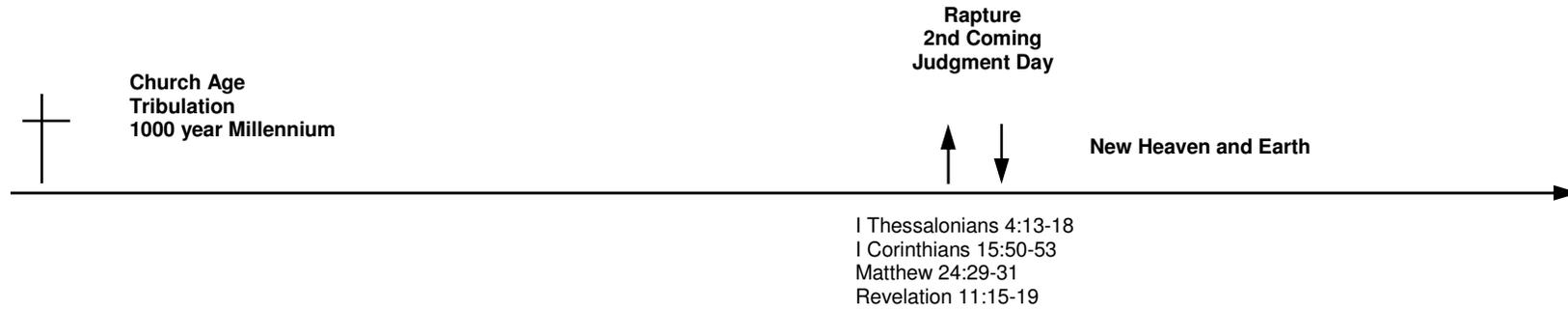
10. The Tribulation Is A Term Used Throughout Scripture To Describe The Hardship Faced By Christians And The Church From The First Coming To The Second Coming Of Christ – Not A Future Seven Year Period Inclusive Of An Individual, Satanically Empowered Antichrist.

Modern View Of Eschatology



VS..

Historical View Of Eschatology



Numerology

Nearly all commentators and informed readers of the book of Revelation will agree that among all the books of the Holy Scripture, Revelation is most replete with biblical numerology – the use of numbers with special meanings. In this book we find fours, sevens, twelves, 666, 1,000, 144,000, and other significant numbers. The purpose of this paper is to explain the significance of the most important numbers used in Revelation and to suggest their symbolic meanings as keys to the interpretation of the book.

Questions and Answers

Q. Why should we try to find symbolic meanings for numbers in the book of Revelation? If we believe the Bible literally, doesn't that mean we should just take a number at face value and not try to "spiritualize" it?

A. This is a good question and an important one. When we say we believe the Bible "literally," what do we mean? I would suggest that what we should mean by this phrase is that we believe the Scriptures communicate truth to the people of God when they are interpreted to mean what the writer (or speaker) intended his words to mean.

For example, in John 15 Jesus says, "I am the vine." Now no one thinks Jesus meant that we should expect to see Him sprouting green leaves and grapes. He meant, of course, that just as a branch must be rightly attached to a grapevine and must depend on that vine for its life and fruitfulness, so His people must depend on Jesus and be rightly connected to Him in order to live and bear fruit. This is what Jesus meant literally. We see that the literal meaning has more to do with the figurative, metaphoric intent of the speaker than it does with the "dictionary meaning" of the words used.

The book of Revelation is written in a literary genre called "apocalyptic" literature. The use of symbolic numbers is a characteristic of apocalyptic writing (portions of the Old Testament books of Daniel and Ezekiel are also apocalyptic in nature). Thus we should not be surprised or perplexed to find numbers used in special ways in this book of Revelation. Recognizing this feature of Scripture is not improperly "spiritualizing" the text; it is merely interpreting the numbers of Revelation in the way the author (ultimately God Himself) meant for them to be understood.

Q. What are some of the key numbers used in Revelation?

A. *The number "four."*

The number four is a significant one in Revelation. Grouping into fours is a literary device found throughout the Bible, used to represent a universality of things in the created world. Today we speak of "the four corners of the earth," even though we know the earth has no corners. By this phrase, we mean "the whole world." Likewise, Revelation uses the number four to represent the totality of creation or mankind. For example, Revelation 4:6-8 describes four living creatures around the heavenly throne of God. These creatures represent all of creation in its praise of the Heavenly Father.

In Revelation 5:9, those purchased from the earth are called “men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Revelation 7:9 says that the great multitude standing before the Lamb (which should be identified with the 144,000; see below) is from “every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues.” In verse 11:9, this fourfold phrase is used to describe the people of the unbelieving world who rejoice over the apparent demise of the church, and in verse 13:7, the same four terms are used to describe people all over the earth who fall under the evil authority of the beast. Thus, we see that the number four is symbolic of the totality or universality of whatever subject in the created world the number is used to describe.

The number “seven.”

Seven is one of the most significant numbers in all the Bible. Like four, seven signifies a completeness or totality. But whereas four is most often used to emphasize the “createdness” of things, seven is generally used to describe subjects of a spiritual or divine nature. In the ancient world, seven was sometimes thought to be the perfect number, the sacred number of God. In Revelation 5:6, the Lamb (symbolizing Jesus) has seven horns (complete power, or omnipotence) and seven eyes (complete knowledge, or omniscience). This same verse echoes Revelation 1:4 in its reference to “the seven Spirits of God,” emblematic of God’s universal activity in both His church and the world. The whole book of Revelation, in fact, is structured around the number seven: seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, etc. These sevens signify the completeness of God’s holiness, His plan, His warnings, and His ultimate judgment of a world which is in rebellion against Him.

The number “twelve”.

Twelve is the number used in Revelation to represent the people of God. The Old Testament church was built on the foundation of the twelve tribes of Israel. The New Testament church is built upon the foundation of the twelve apostles. In Revelation 4:4, John describes seeing the throne of God surrounded by twenty-four thrones, and seated upon them were twenty-four elders. The fact that there were twenty-four (2x12) elders signifies that God’s people of the Old Covenant plus His New Covenant people are all represented in His presence in the form of these elders (representatives of believers under both the Old and New Testaments). The Heavenly Jerusalem, described in Revelation 21, is envisioned as being built almost exclusively on the number twelve, indicating that it is purposely designed to be the eternal dwelling place of God’s people. The length of each of its walls is 12,000 stadia, and the height (or thickness) of the walls is 144 (12x12) cubits. The city has twelve gates with twelve angels as the gatekeepers, and the gates themselves are twelve pearls. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel are written on the twelve gates, and the walls of the city rest upon twelve foundations, on which are inscribed the names of twelve apostles. Revelation 22:2 tells us that the tree of life on the newly recreated earth will bear twelve kinds of fruit during each of the twelve months of the year. We see in the Revelation the beauty of the symbolic use of the number twelve, showing that God’s eternal plan is focused on calling a Bride for His Son and preparing a special place for them to dwell together eternally.

The number “thousand.”

Thousand is a number used both literally and symbolically in the Bible. When “pure history” is being recorded, as in, say, 1 Samuel 15:4, where Saul is said to have summoned 10,000 men of Judah to war, then we should take that number literally or at least as an accurate “rounding” of the number of men summoned. (If there were 9,998 or 10,012 men, that wouldn’t mean the Bible is in error, of course.) Such references are historical, not poetic or apocalyptic. We should take numbers as they are used in the Bible’s historical accounts literally or statistically.

However, sometimes the number thousand is used in a general sense, simply to mean a really large number. When a parent says to a child, “I’ve told you a thousand times not to do that!” no one thinks that the word “thousand” is to be taken literally. Yet, we get the point of the parent’s meaning.

This is the sort of meaning for “thousand” which we read in passages like Psalm 50 and Deuteronomy 7, where the “statistical” approach would be erroneous: “For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills...” (Psalm 50:1). Are we to understand that God owns the cattle on literally only “a thousand hills” and that, therefore, if I can find hill #1,001, I can keep all the cattle I find there? Of course not. The sensible reader will understand that God means that He owns all the cattle (and everything else) on all the hills (and everywhere else). The number “thousand” is used in the poetry of Psalm 50 to mean the “wholeness” or “completeness” of God’s ownership.

Likewise, in Deuteronomy 7:9, God says: “Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments....” What does this mean? If I am in generation #1,001, God won’t love me? Of course not. God means He will always love those who love Him and keep His commandments...even to the thousandth generation! Once again, we see the number “thousand” used in a figurative sense to mean a “wholeness” or “completeness,” this time of God’s love.

In poetic, prophetic, and apocalyptic passages, then, the number “thousand” is better understood in this latter symbolic (rather than a statistical) sense. This fact, of course, has great implications for the interpretation of Revelation 20 and its discussion of the Millennium (literally: “thousand years”). If one were to demand, despite all the symbolic usages of numbers in the Revelation, that the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 must literally mean the time that the earth takes to orbit around the sun a thousand times, his interpretation would be inconsistent at best. The “thousand years” of Revelation 20 describes the period between the First and the Second Comings of Jesus, a long but necessarily indeterminate period of time during which the wholeness of God’s plan for this age is completed. (See the author’s paper *The Millennium*.)

Q. What about the group of people in Revelation called the 144,000? Is that number related to the meanings of the number twelve and the number thousand?

- A. Yes, it is. You have noticed that 12×12 equals 144, and, of course, $144 \times 1,000$ equals 144,000. Let's look at how the meaning of the number 144,000 is revealed in Revelation.

In Revelation 7:4-8, John hears the number of those who are sealed on their foreheads as bondservants of God, thus being protected from the judgment to follow. "And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand from every tribe of the sons of Israel" (v.4). Notice that what he hears is the symbolic number 144,000, and he also hears that they are Israelites. Verses 5-8 tell us that 12,000 are sealed from each of twelve tribes – but on a closer reading, something seems amiss! The list of tribes John gives is apparently in error! Notice that the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are omitted completely from John's list. The tribe of Joseph is included (though not referenced elsewhere in the Bible), and the half-tribe of Manassah, presumably included in the tribe of Joseph (Manasseh's father), is also mentioned separately! Either John has forgotten the names of the twelve tribes, which as a good little Jewish boy he would have learned by heart on his father's knee, or John is letting us know that this list of the tribes is not to be taken literally. Plainly, since the Bible is without error, the latter must be the case.

This interpretation is confirmed by verse 9, where John says that after he heard the symbolic representation of this "144,000," he looked and saw the reality behind the symbol: "...a great multitude which no one could count (not just 144,000), from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues (not just from the nation of Israel), standing before the throne and before the Lamb...."

So we see that the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude are really one and the same assembly of the redeemed. The 144,000 represents all of God's people, all those whom Jesus has saved from the wrath of God. The number 144,000 equals 12 (representing the Old Testament church) $\times 12$ (representing the New Testament church) $\times 1,000$ (indicating the completeness of their number). All believers are sealed in protection from God's judgment, and all believers will stand before God's throne, dressed in "white robes" of righteousness, praising Him forever.

In Revelation 14, this "144,000" is described again as standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb. In verses 14:1-5, we learn many things about this group which confirm our interpretation in chapter 7. These 144,000 are also sealed on their foreheads. They "have not been defiled with women," a reference to Old Testament usage which means they have not followed after false gods. They "follow the Lamb wherever He goes." They have "been purchased from among men....", "No lie was found in their mouth" (they speak the truth: the Gospel), and "they are blameless," without the guilt of sin. Ask yourself who is being described by these phrases, and the answer is plain: Christians, the Church.

Thus, we see that 144,000 is a symbolic number representing the wholeness or completeness of all men and women, boys and girls, who have trusted in Jesus, who have been saved from their sins, and who then follow Christ, in faith and obedience, wherever He may lead them.

Q. What about the frightening number 666? That's the mark of the beast, right? What does that mean?

- A. In Revelation 13:16-18, John writes that “the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the free men and the slaves” are to receive a mark on their foreheads or upon their right hands. This mark is called “the number of the beast.” Significantly, we are also told that the number of the beast “is the number of man.”

This passage has created a tremendous amount of speculation over the centuries. Who (or what) is the beast? What is the meaning of his number? And why is the number of the beast called the number of man? Certainly a brief paper like this one cannot deal with all possible issues which might arise in a discussion of these questions, but a basic and accurate answer may be given which helps clear up the mystery.

When we studied the 144,000, we saw that God caused a “seal” to be placed on their foreheads in order to identify them as His elect people. This image of God sealing His people on the forehead comes from the Old Testament book of Exodus. In Exodus 13:9, just after the Lord had delivered His people from slavery in Egypt, God told the Israelites that they should never forget to tell their children of the salvation from bondage which Jehovah had provided for them. When they remembered their deliverance, God told them, “it shall serve as a sign to you on your hand, and as a reminder on your forehead, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth; for with a powerful hand the Lord brought you out of Egypt.”

Was this sign on the hand and the forehead of the ancient Israelites to be a physical mark, like a brand or a tattoo? No; in fact in Leviticus 19:28 God commands His people not to mark or tattoo their bodies. This sign was to be a spiritual “mark” which would characterize the Israelites as God’s chosen people. The “sign” on the hand meant that everything they did, all of their labor, should be for His glory. The “sign” on the forehead meant that their every thought was to be honoring to Him. The hand and the forehead represented all that the people did and believed – thought, word, and deed. Each Israelite was to show the world that he or she belonged to the great Jehovah and had been redeemed by Him.

In Revelation 13, we read of the beast’s counterfeit seal being applied to those who have been seduced into his kingdom. Like the true seal of God, this mark is not a physical one. It, too, is a spiritual mark, in this case displayed in the thoughts, words, and deeds of those who are the beast’s. Those who bear the mark of the beast belong to this world and live not according to God’s law but according to the rules of the beast’s world-system. As the believer shows his mark by obeying Jesus, the rebel shows his mark by his wicked deeds and evil intentions of his heart.

But why 666? Many suggestions, most of them bizarre and disproved by history, have been made in an attempt to discover the identity of the beast. The ancients identified six as the number symbolizing man, created on the sixth day and being created just a little lower than God. (Note that in Revelation 13:16, six types of men are mentioned as receiving the mark.) God’s sacred number is seven; thus, a trinity of sevens (777) could be said to represent symbolically the triune God. Likewise, a trinity of sixes (666) represents man’s attempt to be God, to usurp the rightful place of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as sovereign in the universe. Satan tempted Adam and Eve by telling them

that if they rebelled against Jehovah, they would be “like God.” The number 666 represents man in his rebellion against his Creator, man seeking to be his own god.

This answer, perhaps, is so evident that many have missed it. Revelation 13:18 tells us plainly, “the number is that of man.” Many people have spent a lot of time trying to identify a man as the beast, but the text tells us that 666 is the number of man, in the sense of mankind (Greek: ἄνθρωπος). It is mankind in rebellion against God, attempting to live in, understand, and interpret the universe with no reference to the Creator, ignoring the evidence that God is here, there, and everywhere. Mankind is very interested that there be no God – at least not a God like the one in the Bible! Man follows his father Adam in going his own way, defying God in an insurrection of conceit and pride. Thus rebellious, autonomous man is the beast, and his number is 666!

Q. One more numerical question: What is the meaning of the references to “a time, times, and half a time,” “forty-two months,” and “twelve hundred and sixty days?” I know all of those numbers add up to the same amount of time, but what do they mean in the book of Revelation?

- A. Popular books lining the shelves of Christian bookstores resound with fictional depictions of terrible conditions which will supposedly take place in a purported future time called the Tribulation. (See the author’s paper on The Tribulation.) Interpreters who envision this alleged future Tribulation place a three-and-a-half year period in the second half of their seven-year Tribulation which they identify with the time spans in question. The question before us is whether such an interpretation is justified by the Bible or whether it is merely an exciting but misguided attempt at predicting the future.

To be sure, the interpretation of these time designations are difficult. The period under discussion is variously called “a time, times and half a time,” “forty-two months,” and “twelve hundred and sixty days” (all equivalent time periods). Nevertheless, by taking the meaning of the book of Revelation as a whole and understanding the “big picture” of God’s plan for this age, the meaning of these numbers becomes clear. Once again we will learn that the meaning of numbers in the book of Revelation is not statistical but spiritual.

The original scriptural reference to this time span is in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 9:27, three-and-a-half years designates the time during which Messiah’s covenant with His people remains in effect after the cessation of sacrifice (through the final sacrifice of Messiah Himself). In Daniel 12:7, the “time, times and a half time” is the period during which God’s plan, including the Resurrection Day and Final Judgment, will be completed.

In Revelation 11:3, the two witnesses (who symbolize the Church in its role as proclaimer of the Gospel to the world) are said to have authority to prophesy for twelve hundred sixty days. In verse 12:6, the woman (who symbolizes God’s people under persecution) is nourished in the wilderness by God for one thousand two hundred sixty days. In verse 12:14, the woman is protected from the presence of the serpent for “a time, times, and half a time.” In verse 13:5, the sea beast (symbolizing the

humanistic/demonic world-system which exalts man and seeks to dethrone God) is given power to act for forty-two months.

To determine the symbolic meaning of the cryptic numbers describing this enigmatic period, let us ask a few questions:

1. *During what period of time does Messiah's covenant with His people remain in effect?*
2. *During what period of time is God's plan being worked out, concluding with the Judgment Day?*
3. *During what period of time is the Church called to evangelize (prophesy to) the world?*
4. *During what period of time does God care for His people, nourishing them and protecting them from the power of the serpent, Satan?*
5. *During what period of time is the anti-God world system at work to replace the sovereignty of God with the sovereignty of man?*

The answer to all of these questions, it should be clear, is the same: The time during which all of these events and processes are taking place is this present age, the time between the First and the Second Comings of Christ. Thus, we conclude that the forty-two months, the twelve hundred sixty days, etc., are symbolic of the time in which we live, between the Resurrection of Jesus and the Resurrection Day for all the world, which will take place at His Return, when also the world will be judged.

Conclusion

1. The book of Revelation, as apocalyptic literature, is full of numerological symbolism. A careful reading of the book and an understanding of biblical numerology help not only to understand the meaning of particular numbers but of the overall meaning of Revelation.
2. God is sovereign. Mankind is in rebellion against its true King. But God has wooed some of the rebels back into faithful service to Him and His Kingdom. Although often persecuted and experiencing tribulation in this world, we servants of the King must bear up with hope and cheer, for our Lord has overcome the world.

The Rapture

The doctrine of the end times advanced in many contemporary Christian circles teaches that just before a supposed future seven-year Tribulation period, the church will be “raptured,” or caught up, and taken out of this world to be with the Lord, while those remaining on earth will be left to undergo the terrors of the Tribulation period. At the end of this purported seven-year Tribulation, it is taught that Christ will return (the Second Coming) and inaugurate a 1000 year Millennial period of peace during which Jesus rules the world from Jerusalem. In this scenario, immediately following the Millennium, the Final Judgment ensues.

*This paper will show that according to the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament writers, the return of Christ, the resurrection of believers, and the judgment of the unbelieving world are not spread out in time over 1007 years. Rather they are simply three ways of describing one and the same day – **the last day**, at the end of the world.*

According to the popular but incorrect teaching one frequently hears, the usual order of eschatology events is taken (with some variation) to be:

- 1. the Rapture, which is “secret” and can occur without warning at any time;*
- 2. the Tribulation, a seven-year period of unprecedented trouble on the earth;*
- 3. the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation, at which time He destroys His enemies and establishes His Kingdom on earth;*
- 4. the Millennium, a 1000-year period of ideal peace during which Jesus reigns over the world from Jerusalem;*
- 5. the Last Judgment (or Great White Throne Judgment) at which time Satan and unbelievers are cast into the lake of fire and (certain) believers receive their rewards; and*
- 6. the re-creation of the world in the form of the new heavens and new earth.*

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate from the Bible that the “Rapture,” the Second Coming, and the Final Judgment are not three distinct events, separated by seven and 1000 years, respectively, but rather that they occur simultaneously and are in fact simply three perspectives on one and the same event, namely, the end of this world

Questions & Answers

Q. What is the meaning of the word “Rapture?”

- A. First, it must be understood that the word “rapture” is found nowhere in the Bible. Passages commonly thought to teach about the “catching up” of the church use language like: “...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52); and “we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). But the word “rapture” is not to be found.

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, the word “rapture” is derived from the Latin *raptura*, meaning “ecstasy,” and thus “caught up.” In religious usage, it commonly refers to the (secret) snatching up of the church to join the Lord in heaven, supposedly just prior to the beginning of the Tribulation period.

Q. Where is the doctrine of the Rapture taught in the Bible?

- A. Since the word “rapture” is not a biblical word, it is better to refer to this event as “the resurrection day,” the day when “the dead in Christ shall rise,” the day when “we will meet the Lord in the air,” the moment believers “change in the twinkling of an eye,” “the blessed hope,” or some other more biblical phrase. Given this provision that we use biblical terminology, 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, and Matthew 24:40-42 are considered key “rapture” passages.

Q. Don’t these passages plainly teach that believers will be transformed and caught up into the clouds to be with the Lord forever?

- A. Certainly. The issue at question here is not whether the church will be caught up by the Lord. It is rather when this event takes place in relation to the other key eschatological events (eschatology is the study of the “last things” or end times), such as the Second Coming and the Final Judgment. Does the resurrection of “sleeping” believers and the snatching up of living believers really take place seven years before the Second Coming and 1007 years before the Last Judgment? That is the real issue, and that is the issue answered in these questions.

Q. OK. Just about every Christian I know believes in the Rapture, the seven-year Tribulation, the 1000 year Millennium, etc. How could everybody be wrong about this?

- A. Actually, the vast majority of Christians in the world today do not hold to the “pre-tribulation rapture” theory. In fact, for the first 18 centuries of church history, no one believed it or had even heard of it. It wasn’t until the publication of *The Scofield Reference Bible* in the late 19th century that this newly conceived view became widespread. The notes at the bottom of the pages of the *Scofield Bible* (*not* the Bible text itself!) promoted this “dispensational” teaching of the “pretrib” Rapture.

Besides, it is not what the majority thinks which determines biblical truth. One should make sure he derives his doctrine from the Bible, not merely from the latest, most popular best-selling book about the “last days” or the opinions of certain teachers, which they insert onto the pages of the Bible in order to advance their theories.

Q. But the Pre-Tribulation Rapture must be true. What do all those verses mean if not this?

- A. A few minutes of careful Bible study will enable the reader to answer this question for himself. *Open your Bible* and follow the passages carefully.

First, read Revelation 11:15-18. What event is described in this passage? Note that it takes place at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (v.15) and that that trumpet signals the time in which "...Thy wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Thy bondservants the prophets and to the saints and those who fear Thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth" (v.15).

This passage describes they day the dead, both the righteous and the wicked, face God in His wrath. Reward is given to those who fear His name, and the others are destroyed. What day is being foretold? There is no doubt that this is the Judgment Day at the end of the world. This is the day Daniel described when he wrote "...those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Note that at the Last Judgment there is the sounding of a trumpet and a gathering together of God's people for reward (and of unbelievers for condemnation).

Now turn to Matthew 24:29-31. Here we read that "after the tribulation of those days...all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (vv.29-31).

What great event is being described in these verses? Virtually all will agree that this is the classic passage describing the Second Coming of Christ.

Note that at His coming there is the sounding of a great trumpet and that there is a gathering of God's people from around the world to receive their reward. As we shall see, it is also important to note that the New Testament Greek word used to describe this Second Coming in v. 30 is **παρουσία** (parousia).

Now read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. This is the passage, partially quoted above, which begins, "...we who are alive and remain until the coming (**παρουσία!**) of the Lord shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..." (vv.15-17).

What event is described here? Of course, this is one of the classic "Rapture" passages. Note that at this event, once again we read of the sounding of the "trumpet of God" and the gathering together of God's people for their reward. It is especially important to note that exactly the same Greek word, **παρουσία**, is used to define both this event and the one described in Matthew 24 (above).

Q. So what does all this mean?

- A. The reader can see that in these passages three future “events” are described: the Last Judgment, the Second Coming, and the Rapture. At each “event” we note that a trumpet is blown and a gathering together of God’s people is brought about. We also see that both the Second Coming (Matthew 24) and the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4) are called the **παρουσία** (parousia).

Q. So maybe there are three different trumpets and three different gatherings!

- A. To assert such a position would indicate a very poor procedure in interpreting the Bible. But fortunately, arguing over whether or not there are three different trumpets and gatherings is unnecessary. 1 Corinthians 15 resolves the issue.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 reads: “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”

What event does this passage envision? It is the transformation of living believers and the raising of the dead in Christ which, as also described in 1 Thessalonians 4, is commonly called the Rapture. Note that once again a trumpet is sounded and there is a gathering together of believers to be with the Lord. But in this text Paul adds a crucial phrase to enhance our understanding. He says that this event will take place at the last trumpet. The last trumpet.

Q. But how can the Rapture trumpet be the last one, if the Second Coming and the Final Judgment and their trumpets are still to come?

- A. Good question. According to the pretrib rapture timetable, the trumpet at the Rapture would have to be the first one, not the last. The Rapture trumpet would come first, then seven years later the Second Coming trumpet, and then 1000 years later would come the trumpet at the Final Judgment. How, then, can what Paul calls “the last trumpet” in 1 Corinthians 15, be in fact the first trumpet? If words mean anything, there is only one way the “first” trumpet can also be the last one: All three trumpets are one and the same.

This means, of course, that all three “events” – the Rapture, the Second Coming, and the Final Judgment – are simply three perspectives on the same occurrence, the end of the world. From the perspective of Christians, we are “caught up” to be with the Lord. From the perspective of Jesus, He returns in His Second Coming. And from the perspective of the unbelieving world, it is Judgment Day. But these are simply three ways of describing the last day, the end of the world.

Q. Hmmm...Are there any other passages in the Bible which put the Rapture at the same time as the Last Judgment?

- A. Yes, there are. In the Gospel of John, chapter 6, Jesus is addressing a mixed group of both believers and unbelievers. In describing His mission in the world, He speaks four different times about what He will do on “the last day.”

Verse 39 says, “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.”

Verse 40 says, “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Verse 44 says, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Verse 54 says, “He who eats My flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day.”

In each of these verses Jesus tells His listeners that those who believe in Him will be raised up (resurrected) by Him on the last day. John was there on that day when Jesus spoke these words, so let us use John as our example. John heard Jesus, believed in Him, and died. According to the pre-tribulation rapture perspective, when will John be raised up from the dead? It will be on the day of the Rapture, when “the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). But this is the day which Jesus calls “the last day.” According to the pre-tribulation rapture view, it is 1007 years before the last day!

Q. But when He says “the last day,” couldn’t Jesus really mean “the last day before the Tribulation begins?”

- A. First of all, notice what this question really asks. It asks the student of the Scriptures not to read what is really in the Bible but rather to “read into” a passage what is not there, that addition which is required by a particular doctrinal position. This is a very dangerous practice, known in scholarly circles as “eisegesis”, or reading into the biblical text teachings not found there.

But there is a definite answer to the above question: No, Jesus could not have meant “the last day before the Tribulation.” How can we know that?

In John 12:48, Jesus is concluding his last public sermon, delivered to a crowd of both believers and skeptics. He says to them, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges Him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”

Here Jesus teaches that unbelievers will be judged at “the last day.” In John 6, He teaches that believers will be raised up on “the last day.” What is the inescapable conclusion? Believers are raised up on the same day unbelievers are judged – on the “last day,” at the end of the world. The day of the Rapture and the day of the Last Judgment are not 1007 years apart. They take place on the very same day.

Q. But what about the verses that say, “One will be taken, and one will be left?” Don’t they show that Christians will be suddenly “raptured,” leaving the unbelievers behind to face the Tribulation?

- A. Matthew 24:40-41 is often thought to teach that believers will be “taken,” leaving unbelievers behind to endure the seven-year Tribulation. Films based on these verses have been made depicting what the Rapture and its aftermath might be like. But a careful reading of the text will show that the rapture of Christians is not at all what is being taught here.

Beginning in Matthew 24:37, Jesus makes a comparison between the days of Noah and the time of His Second Coming: “For the coming (**παρουσία**) of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.” He then summarizes those days, indicating that in spite of the warnings preached by Noah, people continued living life with a “business as usual” attitude: “...they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the Ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming” (24:38-42).

In the above text, the pronouns are very important. To whom do they refer? For example, who were the “they” who were “eating and drinking...marrying and giving in marriage?” They were not Noah and his family, but the unbelievers.

Who were the “they” who “did not understand until the flood came...?” The unbelievers.

Who were the “them” in the phrase, “the flood came and took them all away?” Once again, the unbelievers.

So in the very next verse (24:40), to whom is Jesus referring when He says “one will be taken?” We see that like in the days of Noah, it is not the believer but the unbeliever who is taken. Just as in the days of Noah, at the Coming of the Son of Man it is the unbelievers who are taken away in judgment, while Christians are left to inherit the earth. Far from teaching the sudden rapture of believers, these verses describe the sudden judgment which will fall on unbelievers at the Return of Christ – the **παρουσία** – which is also the day of the Last Judgment and the end of the world, “just like the days of Noah.”

Summary: *In this brief paper, we have shown that while according to the “pre-tribulation rapture” theory, the Rapture, the Second Coming, and Judgment Day are three distinct events separated by 1007 years, a careful reading of Revelation 11, Matthew 24, 1 Thessalonians 4, and 1 Corinthians 15 shows them to be different viewpoints of the same event, which takes place at the end of the world.*

We have also seen that according to Jesus’ teaching in the Gospel of John, chapters 6 and 12, He will both raise up believers and judge unbelievers by His word on the “last day.” Thus the “last day” is the day of both the “Rapture” and the Judgment.

Finally, we have seen that in Matthew 24, it is not believers who are taken away in the Rapture, but unbelievers who are taken away in judgment at the Coming of Christ. Thus we see that the Second Coming and the Judgment are on the same day.

Conclusion

Since (1) the Rapture, the Second Coming, and the Last Judgment are three perspectives on the same event, since (2) the Rapture and the Judgment are on the same day, and since (3) the Second Coming and the Judgment are on the same day, we conclude that the theory of the “Pre-tribulation-rapture” is false. Furthermore, we conclude that on a single day yet to come, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to raise the dead and catch His people up to meet Him in the clouds, to judge all those who have ever lived on the earth, and to create the new heavens and new earth in which His people will dwell in His presence eternally.

The Tribulation

It is commonly heard in modern eschatological teachings that the period known in the Bible as the Tribulation is a seven-year period, yet in the future, which will be evidenced by the emergence of the antichrist. An objective study of the New Testament shows that this claim lacks biblical support.

Questions and Answers

Q. I have always been taught that the Tribulation is a future seven year period which takes place right after the Rapture. The antichrist will arise then, right? Where in the Bible does it say that the Tribulation is seven years long?

A. Not one verse in the entire Bible says the Tribulation is seven years long.

Some point to Daniel 9:24-27 as teaching this, but unless one comes to this passage already believing in the supposed seven-year Tribulation (which is, of course, the point to be proven), he will not find it there. Until about 150 years ago, no biblical commentator, no theologian, no church in Christendom had ever taught such a doctrine. The Tribulation is simply not mentioned in Daniel 9. But if the seven-year Tribulation is not here, where is it?

One would expect that a doctrine as supposedly integral to the church's understanding of the last days as this one purportedly is would be more evident in Scripture. Instead, the doctrine of the "seven-year Tribulation" is supposedly found solely in an admittedly complicated and difficult passage in Daniel 9. This passage in Daniel lends itself to a plain interpretation regarding the life and death of Christ, with no need for fanciful extrapolations about the Tribulation.

Moreover, if the future seven year tribulation is to be found in Daniel, an unmentioned 2,000+ year "parenthesis" must be inserted (by the reader) between the 69th and 70th "weeks" of the prophecy, without contextual or hermeneutical warrant. Seventy "weeks" of years are mentioned in Daniel 9, but there is absolutely no hint in the biblical text which would lead one to postulate a 2000+ year gap between the 69th and 70th weeks, as the "seven-year Tribulation" theory requires. This treatment of the text is hardly "taking the Bible literally," as the purveyors of this doctrine pride themselves in doing.

Q. What verse(s) in the Bible teach that the Tribulation is yet in the future?

A. The New Testament does not teach that the Tribulation is yet in the future. The writers of the New Testament, in the last half of the first century, did not regard the Tribulation as some far off future event. For them the Tribulation was a daily experience as the Jews, the Romans, and the evil one sought to destroy the infant church. The New

Testament certainly says nothing about the Tribulation being future from the perspective of the reader of the Scriptures, especially not from the point of view of modern readers. In fact, numerous passages assume that the Tribulation is already underway at the time of the writing of the books of the New Testament (see below).

Q. What passage teaches that the Tribulation is characterized by the emergence of the antichrist?

- A. No passage teaches this specifically. It may surprise some, for example, that the Book of Revelation, which is the supposed source of much of the teaching about the Tribulation, never once even mentions the antichrist. The Greek word **ἀντίχριστος**, “antichrist”, appears **nowhere** in the entire book. However, once the concept of the antichrist is rightly understood, it becomes clear that antichrist is present during the Tribulation. The issue is, however, what and when is the biblical tribulation.

***Summary:** If one of the key teachings of the Book of Revelation concerns the supposed future seven-year Tribulation led by the antichrist, it is curious indeed that the book of Revelation (1) never mentions the antichrist, (2) never says the length of the Tribulation period is seven years, and (3) never says that the Tribulation is future from the perspective of the reader. The burden of proof is clearly on the one who imposes these teachings onto the book. It is obvious that such teachings are found in a multitude of books sold in Christian bookstores around the U.S. The question is: Where are they found **in the Bible**?*

Q. If the Tribulation is not a seven-year period in the future led by the antichrist, what is it?

- A. The Tribulation is the time of persecution of God’s people, ultimately under the direction of the spirit of the antichrist, which takes place in the last days.

Q. So antichrist is involved in the Tribulation?

- A. Yes, if the Tribulation is rightly understood. In 1 John (written by the Apostle John, also the author of Revelation), John writes to believers **in the 1st century**: “Dear children, **this is the last hour**, and as you have heard antichrist is coming, **even now many antichrists have come**. This is how we know it is the last hour,” and “**This is the antichrist**, the one who denies the Father and the Son,” and “...every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. **This is the spirit of the antichrist**, which you have heard is coming and **even now is already in the world.**” (1 John 2:18; 2:22; 4:3).

Q. How can John say that in his day it was already “the last hour?” Aren’t the last days still in the future?

- A. Again, we must let the Bible define its own terms. According to the Bible, we are now, and have been since the time of the Apostles, in “the last days.”

As we have seen above, John said that in the 1st century it was already the “**last hour**.” In Revelation 1:3 he writes that “the time [of the end] is **near**.”

In Revelation 3:10, Jesus warns of “the hour of testing, **that hour which is about to come** upon the whole world.”

Paul says that his 1st century readers were those “upon whom **the ends of the ages have come**” (1 Corinthians 10:11) and that “the Lord is **near**” (Philippians 4:5).

The writer to the Hebrews says that “**in these last days** [God] has spoken to us in His Son...” (Hebrews 1:2) and wrote in the 1st century, “...now once at the consummation, He has been manifested to put away sin...” (9:26).

James writes, “...the coming of the Lord is **at hand**...the Judge is standing right at the door” (James 5:8,9).

Peter says that Christ has appeared “**in these last times**” (1 Peter 1:20) and that “the end of all things is **at hand**” (1 Peter 4:7). In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter says that Joel’s prophecy concerning the last days was being fulfilled there **on that day**: “...this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be **in the last days**, God says, that I will pour forth my spirit on all mankind...’” (Acts 2:16-17).

Summary: *these verses (and many others) plainly illustrate the fact that the writers of the New Testament defined the age in which they were living, the 1st century, as already being part of “the last days, ...the end times.”*

Q. Isn’t it true that the church is never mentioned in the Book of Revelation from the beginning of chapter 4 until the Great White Throne judgment in chapter 20? Doesn’t this mean the church is “raptured” away and doesn’t go through the Tribulation?

A. Not at all. It is true that the Greek word usually translated “church” is not used in chapters 4 through 20, but this proves neither too much or too little.

On one hand, the word is not used in Revelation 21 and 22, either. These chapters describe the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth. Most teachers would be reluctant to assert that the church is not in heaven for eternity simply because the Greek word **ἐκκλησία** is not found in these chapters. This “argument from silence” is very weak.

On the other hand, **the church is mentioned repeatedly** in chapters 4 through 22, describe in the figurative language typical of the Revelation. The 24 elders, the 144,000, the innumerable multitude, the two witnesses, the woman in the wilderness and her children, and other symbolic representations of various aspects of the church are made throughout the book.

Q. Where does the N.T. teach that the Tribulation began in the 1st century?

- A. In addition to the contexts of the above verses on the last days, in Revelation 1:9, John specifically says to his 1st century readers that he was their “brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus.” The word translated “suffering” in the NIV (translated “the tribulation” in the NAS, KJV, NKJV, et al.) is the Greek phrase τήν θλιψιν, which is the New Testament term for “the Tribulation.” John is telling his readers that they should not fear even though they were in the Tribulation, because they were also in Jesus.

In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus encourages the seven churches of Asia Minor to bear up under circumstances which are most Tribulation-like. He tells the church at Smyrna, “I know your tribulation (θλιψιν)...” (2:9). The churches of Revelation 2 and 3 were enduring evil men and false apostles (Ephesus), persecution by the Jews and imprisonment (Smyrna), dwelling “where Satan’s throne is,” false teaching, idolatry, and martyrdom (Pergamum), false doctrine, immorality, and idolatry (Thyatira), deadness in the church (Sardis), Jewish persecution (Philadelphia), and spiritual indifference and materialism (Laodicea). As these Christians were being persecuted, imprisoned, and killed for their faith, one wonders what sympathy they might have had for comfortable modern teachers who deny that these 1st century brothers were experiencing the Tribulation.

Moreover, the early universal experience of the church in all ages – from the Cross to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), the persecution against the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:2), the well-known Roman atrocities against Christians, the martyrdoms of James, Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles, and the present-day persecution of believers throughout the world, resounds with the characteristics claimed for the Tribulation period.

The world hates us as it hated our Master: “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you...If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also” (John 15:18-20). Jesus’ words have been true and apt warnings for every generation of Christians throughout time.

Once one’s thinking gets beyond the non-biblical seven-year time limitation, the true duration of the Tribulation of the church is evident. The church has been experiencing the Tribulation since the time of the Apostles, and it will continue to do so until Jesus Christ returns to conquer His enemies and put them beneath His feet (Matthew 22:44).

As Jesus tells His disciples in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation (θλιψιν), but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Q. Isn't there a special time called "the Great Tribulation?"

A. In Matthew 24:21, Jesus tells His disciples, "There will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall." Is there even the slightest hint in the words of Jesus that this great tribulation is to be a seven-year period (or of any particular duration) in the distant future? Sober readers might think that if the doctrine of the futuristic seven-year Tribulation were so crucial a key to understanding biblical eschatology, Jesus might have mentioned it here. In fact, such a period is mentioned nowhere in the words of Jesus, nor in the rest of the New Testament (nor the Old, for that matter).

Beginning in Matthew 24:15 and in the parallel passage in Luke 21, Jesus speaks directly to His followers to warn them about the coming destruction of Jerusalem (which took place some 40 years later, in A.D. 70, under the direction of Titus and his Roman legions). He tells them to flee from Jerusalem and Judea and to do so without hesitation: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand" (Luke 21:20). This warning was heeded by His followers when they saw the Roman armies surrounding the city in A.D. 70. The Christians of Jerusalem did escape the slaughter by fleeing to the city of Pella. The unbelievers left behind, however, suffered a horrible fate. The historian Josephus reported that over a million Jews were killed in the attack and that during the lengthy siege mothers ate their own children to avoid starvation. Vultures did indeed gather where the corpses were found (Matthew 24:38). This destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, along with its dead sacrificial system, was the Great Tribulation about which Jesus warned his disciples and their generation.

Conclusion

Despite the widespread popularity in America of the theory of the future seven year Tribulation and the subsequent rise of antichrist, these teachings are simply not found in the Bible.

1. No verse in the Bible says the Tribulation is seven years long.
2. No verse in the Bible says the Tribulation is future. In fact, throughout the New Testament numerous writers and Jesus Himself indicate that even the earliest believers in the first century were already experiencing the Tribulation of the church.
3. The presence and influence of antichrist is not restricted to one satanically empowered man arising in the future. The New Testament is clear that many antichrists had already arisen in the first century. The spirit of antichrist is the spirit of denial of Jesus and the hatred of His church. The workings of antichrist have been evident throughout church history, as attempts to suppress the Church have been universal and millions of Christians have been persecuted and martyred because of their faith in Christ.
4. The absence of the word **ἐκκλησία** in Revelation 4-20 is irrelevant to the issue of whether the church goes through the Tribulation. Many figurative representations of the

church are displayed in those chapters, as should be expected in the most symbolic apocalyptic book in the Bible.

5. The Great Tribulation spoken of by Jesus took place in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. His followers understood His words in that way, and they escaped the terrible siege of Jerusalem, leaving unbelievers to suffer horribly at the hands of the Romans.

The Millennium

The doctrine of the end times advanced in many Christian circles teaches that just before a supposed future seven-year Tribulation period, the church will be “raptured,” or caught up, and taken out of this world to be with the Lord, while those remaining on earth will be left to undergo the terrors of the Tribulation period. According to this view; at the end of this future Tribulation, Christ will return to earth in His Second Coming and set up His Kingdom in Jerusalem, where He will reign for one thousand years. After this one thousand year Millennium, God will judge the world, this present earth will be destroyed, and a New Heaven and New Earth will be created.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate from the Bible that the Millennium is not some far off (or imminent) period lasting 365,000 days (plus leap year days). Rather it is this current age in which we live, beginning with the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ and His seating at the right hand of the Father and ending just before His glorious return at the end of the world.

Questions & Answers

Q. What is the meaning of the word “millennium?”

A. The word millennium literally means “a thousand years,” from the Latin words mille (thousand) and annus (year).

Q. Where in the Bible is the Millennium mentioned?

A. The only chapter in the Bible where the “thousand years” are mentioned is Revelation 20. It is mentioned nowhere else, at least not by the name “a thousand years.”

Q. So what does Revelation 20 have to say about the thousand years?

A. There are actually three characteristics of the “thousand years” described in Revelation 20: (1) Verses 2 and 3 say that Satan will be bound from “deceiving the nations” for a thousand years; (2) verses 4 and 6 say that Christ will reign for the thousand years; and (3) verses 4 and 6 also say that those who are martyred for Christ, those who refuse to worship the beast, and those who have a part in “the first resurrection” (the Resurrection of Jesus, in which all believers have a part) will reign with Christ for the thousand years.

Q. The first thing mentioned is the binding of Satan. What does that mean?

A. In Revelation 20:1-3, John records a vision in which he sees an angel coming down out of heaven with a key and a great chain. In the vision, John sees the angel bind Satan with the chain and then lock him in the abyss. John says the angel “bound him [Satan] for a thousand years.”

Q. So Satan is going to be totally locked away for a thousand years? That's what I have heard. It will be a time of perfect peace on earth, right?

- A. Well, let's finish reading the God-inspired sentence John wrote: Most people seem to stop at the end of verse 2, but the remainder of the sentence is significant: "...and he bound him for a thousand years...so that he might not deceive the nations any longer..." (v.3). In Greek, we call this last phrase a *hina* clause, from the Greek word *ina*, as found in verse 3. *Hina* means "so that" or "in order that." A *hina* clause always introduces a "what for?" passage, telling the reason or purpose for an action. In other words, Satan is bound for **one specific purpose**: *that he might not deceive the nations any longer.*

Q. So? What's the significance of that?

- A. Revelation 20:3 does **not** teach that Satan will be prevented from all activity. The verse says that Satan will be bound from specifically **only one** activity: "deceiving the nations any longer." Those who assume that the "binding of Satan" suggests that he will be totally inactive during the "thousand years" go beyond the specific limits describe in the text itself. During the "thousand years" Satan will be restricted from doing just **one particular thing** he had previously been doing throughout history, namely, "deceiving the nations."

Q. And what does "deceiving the nations" mean?

- A. Two words are crucial to the understanding of the phrase "deceiving the nations." The first is the word translated "deceive." It is the Greek word **πλανᾶω**, *planao*, which means "to lead astray." The second key word is the word translated "nations." This is the word **ἔθνος**, *ethnos* which means both "nations" and (significantly) "Gentiles." Thus the activity of Satan prior to His binding could properly be translated as "leading the Gentiles astray." And it is this activity (and this **alone**) from which he is bound during the "thousand years."

Prior to the coming of Jesus, the whole world (apart from the Jews) dwelt in spiritual darkness, deceived in sin by the "prince of darkness." Throughout the world were the "nations," in which dwelt the "Gentiles," who were being constantly "led astray" by the deceiver. But with the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World, darkness was driven out. "Gentiles" living in the "nations" formerly had no hope, but Jesus came to bring light to the blind and release to the captives. Thus, He told his disciples to go into the world and to disciple the **nations**, baptizing them and teaching them all Jesus had commanded. Thus the Gospel itself, wherever it is preached, is the "great chain" which binds the deceiving power of Satan.

Q. Are you saying that Satan was bound at the First Coming of Jesus? I always heard that he was going to be bound at Jesus' Second Coming.

- A. Yes, that is a popularly taught but historically recent interpretation. However, the first three Gospels make it clear that Jesus' power was already binding Satan's influence even during Jesus' earthly ministry. And the fourth Gospel confirms it.

Matthew 12:29, Mark 3:27, and Luke 11:22 speak of Satan being bound through the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ as Jesus rescues a demon-possessed man from the clutches of Satan. Jesus says that He could not "enter into the strong man's (Satan's) house and carry off his goods (the formerly possessed man) unless he first binds the strong man." Matthew and Mark use the same Greek word for "binding", **δέω** (*deo*). This is exactly the same word used in Revelation 20 to describe the binding of Satan. Luke interprets the word by saying that Satan is bound "when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him."

Who is it who is stronger than Satan and who attacks his kingdom? Who is it who "carries off Satan's goods" by delivering men from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light? Who is it who "binds the strong man?" It is Jesus and the power of His Spirit, working through the Gospel. When was Satan bound? At the first coming of Jesus, when the power of the Gospel began to be extended, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. In John's Gospel, Jesus expresses His binding of Satan by saying, just a week before His crucifixion, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out" (John 12:31). Satan's power was finally destroyed through the Cross, he was "cast out," and he was bound from leading astray the Gentiles any longer.

Q. What a minute! Are you saying that Satan is bound now? Then why is there so much sin and suffering in the world?

- A. It is difficult to change to this biblical view when you have been taught for years that the time of the Millennium will be a time of perfect peace and righteousness (where is **that** taught in the Bible?). But we must not ignore the plain fact that Revelation 20 speaks of the binding of Satan in **only one** aspect of his former power. He no longer deceives the nations, he no longer holds the Gentiles captive. The Gospel has gone out to the Gentile world, and millions upon millions of formerly deceived Gentiles have been set free from bondage to the evil one. But Revelation 20 is specific, narrowly-defined binding does **not at all** require that Satan have absolutely no power. The concept of a totally impotent Satan is not found in Revelation 20. Many people have been trained to see it there, but in fact it is not there.

Q. Well, if Satan is bound now, then that means the thousand years is now. Are you saying we are now in the Millennium?

A. Before answering that, let's look at the other two characteristics of the Millennium as described in Revelation 20 (and remember, Revelation 20 is the only passage in the Bible which mentions the "thousand years"). One of the other characteristics is the reign of Christ during the "thousand years." The other is the reign of the believers with Christ for the "thousand years."

Q. So if we are now in the Millennium, then both of those conditions of the "thousand years" must be fulfilled now, right?

A. Correct. Right now, Jesus is reigning. After His Resurrection, Jesus said, "**All** authority **has been given** to Me in heaven and on earth." Peter said that "God **has made** Him both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). At his stoning, Stephen saw Jesus "standing **at the right hand of God**," the place of ultimate authority and power (Acts 7:56). Verses showing that Jesus is now ruling could be multiplied, but these suffice to show that from the New Testament perspective, Jesus has been ruling from the throne of David ever since his Resurrection (cf. Peter's explanation in Acts 2:29-32).

Q. But I thought this reign of Jesus was to be on the earth. He is in heaven now, not on earth, right? Are you saying his reign is from heaven, not from the earth?

A. That's right – He reigns from heaven. What is there in this Revelation 20 passage which would make one think it is describing an **earthly** reign of Jesus? Notice that John says (in v. 4) that he saw "the **souls** of those who had been beheaded....and those who had not worshipped the beast..." Where would one expect to see such souls? In heaven, now on the earth! Not to get too technical, but the word for "soul" followed by the genitive case in Greek (as this usage is) is never used of a "whole," embodied person on earth. These are souls, the same ones described in Revelation 6:9, obviously in heaven in the period between the First and Second Comings of Christ.

Q. Well, who are these "beheaded" people and "those who had not worshipped the beast" in verse 4?

A. These two groups represent all Christians and their presence in heaven. The early church had (as we should have) a high regard for those who had sealed their testimonies with their blood – martyrs "because of the testimony of Jesus" (v.4). Thus they are singled out for special mention as being there in heaven in the very throne room of God. "Those who had not worshipped the beast" are all other Christians throughout the ages who have remained faithful to their Lord. We are assured that resisting the "beast" will be rewarded in the presence of God. "They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (v.4). Again, these are the same souls referred to in Revelation 6:9, obviously in heaven with Christ.

Q. Who are the ones who have “a part in the first resurrection” in verse 6?

- A. There has only been one resurrection thus far in the history of the world – the Resurrection of Jesus. Plainly, then, His must be the “first” one. Revelation 20:6 tells us that those who have “a part in the first resurrection” are “blessed and holy.” They need not fear “the second death” (the lake of fire, cf. v. 16), they will be “priests of God and of Christ,” and “they will reign with Him for a thousand years.”

Who are these people who reign with Christ? Well, according to the New Testament, what group of people is called blessed? Christians. Who are the holy ones? Christians. Who need not fear the lake of fire? Christians. Who are priests of God and Christ, a “royal priesthood?” Christians. The answer in every case is: Christians! It is believers in heaven and on earth (through their position “in Christ”) who reign with Him for the thousand years.

Q. So you are saying that Christians are now reigning with Christ in heaven and on earth?

- A. I think that is what this difficult passage teaches. But, fortunately, there are at least two other very important passages in the New Testament which confirm that Christians are even now reigning with Jesus. The majestic passage in Ephesians 2 informs us of our position “in Christ”: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and **seated us with Him in the heavenly places...**” (Ephesians 2:4-6).

Notice how this passage parallels the description in Revelation 20: In both passages Christians are made alive together with Christ, and in both they reign with Jesus, being seated in the heavenly throne room with Him. This means that **right now** Jesus is reigning, and the “saints” are reigning with Him.

In addition, in the great passage in Romans 5 in which Paul describes the believer’s union with Christ and His righteousness, the Apostle writes that those who receive Christ’s gifts of grace and righteousness “will reign in life” (not simply after death) by the power of Christ. Once again we see that believers, both on earth and in heaven, are reigning **now** with their Lord Jesus Christ. Realizing that we are reigning with the one who is **now** ruling from the throne of David in the heavenly throne room can make a great difference in the way we view our lives, our trials, and our present victory in Jesus.

Q. So the three conditions of the Millennium are already met...now?

- A. Yes. We have seen (1) that Satan is bound from deceiving the nations any longer, (2) that Jesus is reigning now, and (3) that his people are now reigning with Him. In the **only** passage in the Bible that mentions the “one thousand years,” these are the **only** three characteristics mentioned by which we can determine what and when the Millennium is. It seems clear that all three conditions of the “thousand years” have been met, **beginning at the time of Jesus’ Resurrection and Ascension.**

Q. Well, I can think of a big problem with that viewpoint. It has been much longer than a thousand years since Jesus rose from the dead! The thousand years have already run out!

- A. Good point. If the “thousand years” means literally the time that the earth takes to orbit around the sun a thousand times, then certainly we have a problem. But a little biblical investigation will show that when the phrase “thousand years” is understood from a biblical perspective, there is no problem at all.

First, let me ask you this: What is the most symbolic, figurative book in the Bible? Nearly everyone will surely agree it is the book of Revelation. Second, what book contains the most numerology, that is, significant numbers with special meanings? Again, most everyone will agree that it is the Revelation. In that book we find threes, fours, sevens, twelves, 666, 144,000, and other significant numbers. Most students of the Revelation understand these numbers to have figurative or symbolic meanings: four is the number of creation, six is the number of man, seven is the number of God, twelve is the number of the church, and so on.

Now, with all of this numerology in the Revelation, does it seem to be a good interpretive approach to say, “Yes, I know that six is the symbolic number of man, and seven is the symbolic number of God, and twelve is the symbolic number of the church, but, by golly, when we come to the number ‘one thousand’ in chapter 20, that one is literal! That one is not a symbol; it’s a statistic!” Such an interpretation of the meaning of the passage in chapter 20 would be inconsistent at best.

This “statistical” approach is especially troublesome when we look at the meaning of the number 1,000 as it is found elsewhere in the Scriptures. When “pure history” is being recorded, as in, say, 1 Samuel 15:4, where Saul is said to have summoned 10,000 men of Judah to war, then we should take that number literally, or at least as an accurate “rounding” of the number of men summoned. (If there were 9,998 or 10,012 men, that wouldn’t mean the Bible is in error, of course.) That is history, not poetry or vision, and we should take the bible’s historical accounts literally, or statistically.

But what about this verse: “For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills...” (Psalm 50:1)? Are we to understand that God owns the cattle on **literally** only “a thousand hills” and that, therefore, if I can find hill #1,001, I can keep all the cattle I find there? Of course not. The sensible reader will understand that God means that He owns **all** the cattle (and everything else) on **all** the hills (and everywhere else). The number “thousand” is used in the poetry of Psalm 50 to mean the “wholeness” or “completeness” of God’s ownership.

Here’s another: “Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to the *thousandth* generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments...” (Deuteronomy 7:9). What does this mean? That if I am in generation #1,001, God won’t love me? Of course not. God means He will always love those who love Him and keep His commandments...even to the *thousandth* generation! Once again we see the number “thousand” used in a figurative sense to mean a “wholeness” or “completeness,” this time of God’s love.

Q. So you are saying that the number “one thousand” in Revelation 20 is also figurative or symbolic?

- A. Don't you agree? Does it make sense to take a number which is frequently used elsewhere in Scripture in a poetic or figurative way and then “demand” that in the most symbolic book in the Bible it must be understood as a literal statistic rather than as a figure or symbol?

As in the other figurative uses we have seen, the number “thousand” in Revelation 20 means “wholeness” or “completeness,” in this case the wholeness of the time between the First and Second Comings of Jesus, the time between His Resurrection and His Return, the time during which God's redemptive plan is being completed: the Millennium!

Q. I have to think about that...it's all so new to me.

- A. Take your time...but DO think about it. Look at it this way: Revelation 20 begins with a figurative representation of the earthly ministry of Jesus when Satan is bound by Jesus “for a thousand years” through the power of the Gospel (vv. 1-3). Then this age “between His Comings” in which we live is symbolically represented as that same “thousand years,” when believers reign with Christ (vv. 4-6). Finally, “when the thousand years are completed” (and Satan is apparently released for a short time to deceive the nations once again), the end of the world will come with the casting of Satan into the lake of fire (vv. 7-10) and the final judgment of mankind at the Great White Throne (vv. 11-15). Revelation 20 is thus a condensed version of spiritual, redemptive history from the First Coming of Christ until His Second Coming at the Judgment Day.

Q. But I have always heard that the Millennium was a time of worldwide peace, when the lion lies down with the lamb. The world sure doesn't look like that now!

- A. I agree that the world doesn't look like that now! The question before us is, Does the Bible really say that the Millennium will be such a time?

The passage quoted to describe what many have been taught is the Millennial period is Isaiah 11:6-9. Here we learn that a time is coming when “the wolf will dwell with the lamb,...and the lion will eat straw like the ox;...they will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain....” Other idyllic descriptions of this future age are found in these verses, but these will suffice to convince us that whenever this time is, it is not now!

Q. I agree. So the period Isaiah describes must be the Millennium when Jesus rules on the earth and brings worldwide peace...right?

- A. We have already shown that the Millennial reign of Jesus is *not earthly*, and a careful reading of Isaiah will confirm that this passage in Isaiah 11 does not describe the Millennium.

To prove that, let's look at another passage: Isaiah 65:25. There Isaiah writes, "The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox;...and they shall do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain,' says the LORD."

Sound familiar? Would you agree that this passage is parallel to the one we read in Isaiah 11, that it is describing the same thing, the same era?

Q. Yes, I would agree...the two passages use exactly the same words. I guess it would be difficult to say that this passage was not describing the same time as the other, wouldn't it?

A. I think you are correct. But I say again that the time described in Isaiah 11:6-9 and in Isaiah 65:25 is **not** the thousand year Millennium as a so-called "Golden Age of Peace."

Q. How can you be so sure?

A. Look at the passage which forms the beginning of the paragraph in which Isaiah 65:25 is found. The paragraph begins in Isaiah 65:17: "For behold, I create **new heavens** and a **new earth**; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind." The following verses (concluding in verse 25) figuratively describe the conditions which will exist in **the new heavens and the new earth!** According to Revelation 21:1, God will create the new heavens and new earth after the Final Judgment. Therefore, these passages **do not** describe a thousand year Millennium of peace with Jesus reigning in Jerusalem after the Tribulation but before the final Judgment. Rather they **describe the new eternal world**, the heavenly Jerusalem, which comes into being after the end of the age.

Conclusion

1. The thousand year Millennium is mentioned in only one chapter of the bible: Revelation 20. In that chapter, three characteristics unique to the thousand years are mentioned: (a) Satan is bound from deceiving the nations (leading Gentiles astray); (b) Jesus reigns; and (c) believers reign with Christ. According to the New Testament, all three of these characteristics have been in evidence since the earthly ministry, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus.
2. The number "thousand" is used in Scripture figuratively to mean "completeness" or "wholeness." It is inconsistent with the symbolism of the book of Revelation and with the use of "thousand" in the rest of Scripture to insist that the "one thousand years" of Revelation 20 are a literal, statistically precise 1,000 calendar years.
3. The so-called "Golden Age of Peace" of Isaiah 11, taught by many to be a description of the Millennial period is actually a description of the new heavens and new earth, as also described in Revelation 21 and 22.

Therefore, the Millennium is not some future thousand year period during which Satan is bound from all activity and Christ will rule the earth. The “thousand years” of Revelation 20 is this present age in which we live, the period between the First and Second Comings of Christ, during which the Gospel is preached to all the earth (since by the power of the Gospel Satan is bound from deceiving the Gentiles) and during which the saints reign victoriously with Christ in the heavenly places, awaiting the day of His glorious Return when he gathers His people to Himself, judges the living and the dead, and opens the gates of eternity for all who are His at His Coming.

The Conflict Between Christ And The Dragon

(With The Church Emerging Victorious)

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