

# Revelation 20

Gospel Reign Of King Jesus: Shelf 6 — Volume 52

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In these times it is very important for Bible students to be very objective in their understanding of what is presently transpiring in the spiritual world. What often happens in times as these is that when there are conflicts that prevail before us in a world of constant social chaos, we are sometimes deceived into allowing such conflicts to affect our understanding of the Bible. We forget that “wars and rumors of war” have happened since the beginning of mankind on earth. It is only when the international news media was developed that the Bible believer became constantly bombarded with all the international chaos that prevails throughout the world. This is especially true among those people who have rejected King Jesus as the King of the universe. It is imperative, therefore, that we take a moment in our Bible study to focus specifically on the subjects that the Bible teaches in reference to the gospel reign of King Jesus. The following series of studies of Shelf 6 of the *Library* deal specifically with sorting out much of the confusion that has been generated in the religious world about these matters.

## Chapter 1

### • PROPHECY OF THE KING'S REIGN •

There are those today who advocate the teaching that Jesus is not now reigning over all things. He is not now reigning over a kingdom that includes all that exists, both in heaven and on earth. Those who teach this theology affirm that the prophecies concerning Jesus' universal reign that were made in the Old Testament have not yet been fulfilled in their entirety. These prophecies were not fulfilled when Jesus ascended to the right hand of God in Acts 1, but will be fulfilled when He comes again to establish a supposed earthly kingdom.

To make this matter more confusing, there are some of those who believe in the physical kingdom reign of Jesus who teach that Jesus' kingdom reign refers to two reigns: **(1)** The first reign is that Jesus is now reigning over the kingdom of God that is referred to as the "church." His present reign is thus limited to this world and the church only. **(2)** After the conclusion of this reign, Jesus will assume a second reign that will be over a physical kingdom that will last for one thousand years here on earth. It is affirmed, therefore, that there are these two kingdom reigns of Jesus. The kingdom reign of Jesus is thus divided into a spiritual reign over the church and a physical reign over this literal earth.

One thing that has led to the belief of some in the future physical reign on earth is **a failure to see the totality of the present reign of Jesus over all things.** When we consider the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament, the universal reign of the Messiah is clearly pictured. The Messiah, the Christ, is pictured in the Old Testament as the One who would assume a worldwide reign over all things. When we study the Old Testament passages of prophecy concerning the reign of the Messiah, this truth is very evident. However, the problem comes when interpreters do

not see this prophesied universal reign in the present reign of Jesus.

Too many Bible interpreters have confined Jesus' present reign to a "limited kingdom reign" that is a reign only over the church of His disciples. In limiting the reign of Jesus in this way, physical millennium interpreters have assumed that the prophecies of the Old Testament have thus not been completely fulfilled. And they are right if Jesus' present reign is limited only to the church. If the universal kingdom reign of Jesus has not been fulfilled in Jesus' present reign, **then the Old Testament prophecies concerning His universal reign have not been fulfilled.** Premillennialists simply state that these prophecies will eventually be fulfilled in the one-thousand-year earthly reign that is yet to come when Jesus comes.

**Since the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the past when Jesus ascended, then we must assume that they will not be fulfilled in the future.**

One common misunderstanding concerning the kingdom in Old Testament prophecy **is the misunderstanding that the kingdom and church are the same thing.** This belief results in either limiting Christ's present reign, or it leaves unfulfilled those prophecies that affirm the universal reign of Christ as king and head over all things.

**If prophecy pictured the sovereignty of Christ over all things, and He is now reigning only over a kingdom called the church, then the prophecies have not been fulfilled.**

If the church and the kingdom are the same, then the preceding is a logical conclusion. If this conclusion is true, then when will Jesus fulfill the universal kingdom reign prophecies of the Old Testament? If He has not fulfilled them in this present age, then He must plan to fulfill them when He comes again. But in the discussion that follows, we will discover that this is an erroneous conclusion.

The biblical answer to the relationship of the kingdom reign of Jesus and church is actually simple. The word “kingdom” (*basileia*) refers to God’s rule from heaven, It is used as a metaphor, taken from how we understand kingdoms of this world.

But the word “church” (*ekklesia*) **refers to our response on earth to the kingdom reign of Jesus from heaven.** As the will of the Father is done on earth as it is done in heaven (See Mt 6:9,10), then kingdom reign is accomplished within the hearts of the obedient (See Lk 17:20,21).

All the church is within the kingdom reign of King Jesus, but all those who are of the kingdom are far beyond those who are of the church.

With one passage the preceding point is proved. **1 Peter 3:22** states that Jesus *“has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”* Angels, authorities and powers **are certainly not in the church.** However, **they are under the present kingdom reign of Jesus.** The church is the called out assembly of people who have submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus. On the other hand, there are insurrectionists in every kingdom. Satan and his angels are disobedient insurrectionists. Nevertheless, Jesus is still King **of kings.** He is Lord **of lords** (1 Tm 6:15). And thus, Satan and His angels are in the realm of Jesus’ present kingdom reign.

We must thus restudy the prophecies that speak of the universal reign of Jesus. The following points of this chapter are a brief survey of those prophecies that prepared Israel for the coming universal reign of the Messiah over all things. In order to understand these prophecies and their fulfillments, there is a very important word the Holy Spirit used that must be clearly understood.

As previously stated, this is the word “kingdom.” This word is used in the Old and New Testaments to refer to earthly kingdoms that have borders, literal thrones, constitutions and armies. However, when we use this

word to refer to the kingdom of God, it is obviously understood that something beyond a literal meaning must be interpreted. When the word “kingdom” is used in reference to the authority or reign of God over that which exists, **a metaphorical meaning must be understood**. God’s kingdom reign does not have literal borders. There are no literal armies with guns and bombs to maintain order.

The word “kingdom” is the only word of human language that the Holy Spirit could use to define the reign of God in the affairs of this world. Therefore, when we study prophecy and fulfillment in reference to the reign of God, we must understand that God’s kingdom is not of this world. Jesus said to an earthly ruler, Pilate, at the time of His final trial,

*“My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here”* (Jn 18:36).

This one statement of Jesus alerts us to think beyond a physical understanding of the word “kingdom” when discussing His kingdom that presently exists. Unless we understand that the kingdom of King Jesus is spiritual, we will misunderstand the prophecies that speak of the kingdom reign of the Messiah.

Several words could possibly be used to partially convey the relationship of King Jesus with the created world and its inhabitants. We could use the word “sovereignty” that refers to rule or reign. The phrases “kingdom reign” or “sovereign reign” would also be acceptable translations to convey in some way the governing control of Jesus in reference to the creation. Whatever word or phrase we use, we must keep in mind that this is one area where **we must allow the Bible to define the meaning**. But even in the use of these words and phrases we are limited in our understanding because our understanding is limited to our experiences of this world. Therefore, **we must not allow our earthly experiences to define God’s actions in reference to those things that are**

## beyond our experiences.

What we must understand is the fact that **there is no earthly word that can adequately explain the kingdom reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.** However, we can at least understand that the kingdom reign of King Jesus is not something of this world. We cannot compare it with worldly kingdoms.

One of the problems with premillennial interpreters is that **they cannot get their theology beyond earthly definitions.** Every time they hear the word “kingdom,” they think of this earth. They thus miss the point of the glorious kingdom reign that is pictured in prophecy, for they cannot see within Old Testament prophecy the present glorious kingdom reign of Jesus over all things. And if one cannot see in the present kingdom reign of Jesus the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy concerning the reign of the Messiah, then he or she will often look somewhere else for an earthly interpretation. It is for this reason that many people look to a future physical reign of Jesus on earth.

We must, therefore, keep in mind that the kingdom in prophecy was not to be a physical kingdom in which the subjects would use military power to propagate it throughout the world. Though this theology is sometimes believed by those of this time who are seeking a military or political solution to the expansion of their religious beliefs, **such efforts are entirely foreign to the teachings of the entire New Testament.**

If we understand that the kingdom is not physical and of this world, then much of the confusion that has been taught concerning the millennial reign of Jesus is cleared up.

Consider the following Old Testament prophecies concerning the universal kingdom reign of Jesus.

### A. Consummation Of Kingdoms

**The Messiah’s kingdom reign would consume the authority of all earthly kingdoms.**

## 1. Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

In Daniel 2 the prophet Daniel interpreted a God-given dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Dn 2:36-45). The great image of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar was a prophecy of **four earthly kingdom reigns**. The first was that of Nebuchadnezzar who represented the **Babylonian kingdom** (Dn 2:37,38). After the Babylonian kingdom another, the **Medo-Persian kingdom**, would and did arise on the earth (Dn 2:39). After the Medo-Persian kingdom, another kingdom, the **Greek kingdom**, arose (Dn 2:39). A fourth kingdom also arose after the Greek kingdom. This was the **Roman kingdom** (Dn 2:40).

Daniel then interpreted that it would be **in the days of the fourth kingdom, the Roman empire, that God would set up another kingdom reign**. This kingdom would have authority on earth, but it would not be a physical kingdom as was characteristic with the earthly Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman kingdoms. It would be a spiritual kingdom that was manifested on earth, but was not of this world.

**a. Daniel's interpretation:** Daniel interpreted and recorded the Daniel 2 vision that God gave him:

*And in the days of these kings [the Roman Kingdom] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; **it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever** (vs 44).*

Herein is the prophecy of a kingdom reign that would assume the totality of authority that was manifested and exercised by the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman kingdoms. However, keep in mind that the authority of this coming kingdom would not be exercised in the manner that earthly kingdoms exercise their authority. On the contrary, the kingdom that would manifest authority from heaven would be a kingdom reign **within the hearts of submitted subjects**, not through weapons of war.

The kingdom reign revealed in Daniel 2:44 would be **universal**. It would extend throughout the world. There would be no limits to the extent of its authority. This prophecy, therefore, is speaking of a universal kingdom reign that would come in the days of the Roman kings.

Though the prophecy itself does not explain any individual king in reference to this kingdom, the fact is that the kingdom would be universal. It would have no earthly limitations. We would assume, therefore, that the One who would reign over this kingdom would exercise all authority over all things. The universality of the kingdom assumes the existence of the universality of the authority of the King.

We must keep in mind that in this prophecy, as well as in other Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom, **the kingdom reign or sovereignty of the king is emphasized**. The prophecies assume the sovereignty of the king over all things because His kingdom reign would extend over all things. The reason these prophecies are emphasizing the kingdom is because contrasts were being established between the earthly kingdoms that were in power at the time the prophecies were made with the spiritual kingdom to come.

In the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament, a contrast was prophesied that would exist between the limited kingdom of national Israel and the response to the kingdom reign that would come from all nations during the time of the Messiah's reign.

**Universal kingdom assumes universal kingship.** This means that universal kingship assumes universal kingdom reign. And if the King is to have universal kingdom reign, then the response to the reign (church) would go throughout all nations. The subjects of the kingdom would not be confined to one nationality of people.

**Verse 44** of Daniel 2 is discussing the establishment of kingdom reign. In **verse 45** of Daniel's interpretation, "a stone" was cut out of the mountain. It broke in



pieces the power of all earthly authorities. It did so by breaking the power of the fourth kingdom (Rome) (See Dn 2:34,35). Herein is the impact of heavenly sovereignty manifested on earth in the hearts of obedient people.

When the will of the Father was done on earth as it was done in heaven (See Mt 6:9,10), **then the kingdom reign of the Son of God was manifested on earth.** This was done in the days of the Roman kingdom. Herein is the church (the stone), and the influence on earth of heavenly kingdom reign.

One can only imagine the anticipation that was created in the minds of the Jews as they read this prophecy, for Daniel concluded, *“The great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this”* (Dn 2:45).

## B. The Kingdom Of All Nations

**The Messiah would exercise kingdom reign over all peoples and nations of this world.**

### 1. Daniel's dream:

In **Daniel 7**, the prophet Daniel experienced a vision that is parallel in meaning to that of Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Daniel 2. The same four earthly kingdoms were revealed to Daniel, though through different symbols. The earthly kingdoms were the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman governments. The significance of the four kingdoms is the last kingdom. It would be in the days of the fourth, the Roman Empire, that God would do His work in establishing the kingdom reign of Jesus.

**a. Daniel's interpretation:** In the interpretation of the vision, a significant prophecy is made in verses 13 & 14:

*I [Daniel] was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like **the Son of Man** [Jesus], **coming with the clouds of heaven** [Jesus' ascension]! He came to the Ancient of Days [God, the Father], and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him [Jesus] was given dominion and glory and sovereignty, **that all***

*peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which will not pass away, and His kingdom the one that will not be destroyed.*

At least one thing is clear from this prophecy. The One who ascended to the Ancient of Days in the heavens **was given a kingdom, or dominion, over all peoples, nations and languages.** In this parallel vision and interpretation of Daniel 2 a king is identified. The Daniel 2 vision, and interpretation, **reveals the universality of the kingdom reign in contrast to the temporary and limited existence of earthly kingdoms.** The Daniel 7 vision and interpretation **reveals the universality of the authority of the king.**

We cannot stress enough **the universal picture of kingdom reign** that is portrayed in the prophecies of both Daniel 2 and 7. This universal sovereignty is placed in contrast to the limited kingdom reigns of earthly governments. When it came to the fulfillment of these two prophecies, therefore, we must not make the mistake of limiting the kingdom reign of the One who fulfilled these prophecies.

In the prophecy of Daniel 7:13,14, the indefinite article “a” is **not** used in reference to the word “kingdom.” Therefore, what was given the One who ascended to the Ancient of Days was sovereignty or kingdom reign. Since the word “kingdom” must be understood metaphorically in reference to God’s sovereign relationship with humanity, then **it must refer to kingdom reign in a spiritual sense.** Emphasis is on the position and honor of the King. And in reference to His rule, **emphasis is on sovereignty.** The realm from which sovereignty is manifested is in the realm of the Ancient of Days. This is in the heavenly reign of God. Thus Daniel 7:13,14 **is a picture of what would take place in and from heaven and not from this earth.**

The kingdom reign would be manifested on earth only when the will of the Father was done on earth as it is done in heaven. It is this nature of a kingdom reign for which Jesus, during His earthly ministry, instructed

His disciples to pray. *“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Mt 6:9,10).

When men and women submit to the will of the Father on earth, then truly the present kingdom reign of Jesus from heaven is within them, and the will of the Father is done on earth (See Lk 17:20,21). This kingdom reign would be manifested through the church of disciples to the will of their King.

### C. Reign Over All Nations

The Messiah would exercise kingdom reign over all the nations of this world.

#### 1. Kingdom reign of the Father:

In order to understand New Testament kingdom reign prophecies concerning Jesus, **it is necessary to understand that Jesus assumed the kingdom reign of the Father over all things that is pictured in the Old Testament.** In the Old Testament it is affirmed that **the Father was king and head over all things.** Through prophecy, the Holy Spirit prepared Israel for a coming change from the Father to the Son of this kingdom reign.

Concerning the kingdom reign of the Father, David stated,

*Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; **for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all*** (1 Ch 29:11,12).

In this statement of David, the Father is pictured as **“head over all”** and reigning **“over all.”** This picture is also revealed in the Psalms. *“The Lord is King forever and ever”* (Ps 10:16). *“The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory”* (Ps 24:10). *“All the ends of the world will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the*

*families of the nations will worship before you. For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He rules over the nations"* (Ps 22:27,28). *"The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom [sovereignty] rules over all"* (Ps 103:19).

At least one thing is clear from the preceding statements concerning the kingdom reign of the Father: **The Father ruled over all things before the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father to assume this sovereignty.** If we understand this point, then it is easy to understand what Jesus meant when He said at the end of His earthly ministry **that all authority had been given to Him** (See Mt 28:18). It is easy to understand the fact that Jesus is now King of kings and head over all things. We understand that the Father handed over universal kingship to the Son when He was seated at the Father's right hand in heavenly glory.

Daniel revealed that the Son of Man would receive *"dominion [sovereignty], glory and kingdom reign"* (Dn 7:14). This is the authority that Jesus received when He ascended to the right hand of the Father. **He is now reigning with all dominion and glory with sovereignty from heaven over all things.** His universal kingdom reign, therefore, is not something that will come in our future. It is happening at this present time, for Jesus has already ascended to the right hand of God.

## **2. Prophecy of change in kingdom reign:**

Isaiah prophesied, *"Now it will come to pass in the latter days [last days of national Israel] that the mountain of the Lord's house will be established on the top of the mountains, and will be exalted above the hills; and all nations will flow to it"* (Is 2:2). Isaiah prophesied that **all nations** would eventually come under the kingdom reign that was to come in the final years of national Israel. There would thus be a universal nature of the kingdom reign **that would be exalted above all earthly authorities.**

Isaiah continued that *"many people will come and*

say, **‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain [ruling power] of the Lord’**” (Is 2:3). Isaiah was saying to Israel that the Messiah to come after him would **“judge between the nations”** (Is 2:4). When the Messiah came, Isaiah affirmed that peoples from every nation would come and subjugate themselves to the reign of the new King. They would submit to His kingdom reign that would be greater than all earthly kingdoms combined together. King Jesus would subsequently judge between the nations by His word. The subjects would judge themselves to be of the kingdom by their voluntary submission to the word of the King.

The expanse of the kingdom reign to which the Jews were to look forward would go beyond the borders of Israel. It would expand to all peoples in all nations of the world (See Mc 4:1-3). If we understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom reign of God in the affairs of humanity before the gospel ascension of the Son of God, then it is not difficult to understand Isaiah’s prophecy. It was a prophecy that there would eventually come a day when people from all nations would submit themselves in obedience to the gospel of a new King.

Jesus now reigns in the hearts of those who have submitted to His kingdom reign (See Lk 17:20,21). In this sense, **His kingdom reign is not of this world as a physical kingdom. It is a kingdom reign in all the world in a spiritual sense.** He now reigns over all things as King of kings and Lord of lords (See 1 Tm 6:15).

The prophets prepared Israel for a change in the sovereign reign of the Father. The change in sovereignty would change from the Ancient of Days (the Father) to the Son of Man. The time would come when the One who would ascend unto the Ancient of Days would be given kingdom reign over all nations. This kingdom reign would be established in the days of the Roman kings. It would be established in the last days of national Israel when God would consummate national Israel, for it would have completed its purpose of bringing the Savior of the world into the world.

As students of the Old Testament, we must not miss this point. The Old Testament promises were to prepare Israel for the coming King. If we miss these promises, and their fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth, then we are saying that God did not make specific promises to the children of Israel concerning the coming of the Messiah of Israel. And, we are saying that His promises to Israel were not fulfilled in the gospel incarnation and ascension of the Son to the right hand of God.

## Chapter 2

### • FULFILLMENT IN REVELATION 20 •

Unfortunately, the key Bible text that is used to support the concept of a physical millennial reign of Jesus that is yet in the future is **Revelation 20:1-6**. It is for this reason that we must first go to this text in general in order to discover that the “millennial reign” of King Jesus, about which John wrote, was a spiritual reign, which kingdom is now fully in existence.

This is the **only** text in the Bible that mentions a “one-thousand year reign.” If it were not for this text, there would be no such concept of a one-thousand year reign on earth of King Jesus. But the fact is that John revealed something concerning a one-thousand year reign, and thus we must examine in detail what John wrote.

For many years, inconsistent Bible study principles have been used to understand Revelation 20. Subsequently, many people have been led to believe a host of false conclusions that have come from the metaphors of this passage. Our challenge is not to sort through the jungle of speculative theories of Bible interpreters in order to interpret Revelation 20:1-6. It is our challenge to go first to the text itself in order to understand the encouraging message that John was trying to convey to his initial audience, which audience would include ourselves.

### A. Principles Of Interpretation

The book of Revelation is probably one of the most misunderstood books of the Bible. It could be stated that Bible interpreters misunderstand this book more than any other book of the Bible. They do so because of improper Bible study principles that are used to interpret this highly figurative book that was written in cryptic language with many metaphors. Therefore, when we come to a study of any portion of Revelation, there are a few principles of interpretation that must be emphasized in order to properly understand this book. If these principles are honored, much of the confusion that has resulted from a mishandling of Revelation can be cleared up. Therefore, consider the following principles that must be understood in order to interpret properly the book of Revelation:

### **1. First figurative, then literal:**

**We must first assume a figurative interpretation of any text of the book, and then consider a literal interpretation.** This is the reverse principle of interpretation that is used with most of the other books of the Bible. With other books of inspiration, the principle is first to understand the text in a literal manner, unless in the context there is justification to understand the message figuratively. However, when we come to the book of Revelation, we must first understand the general nature of the message figuratively unless there is a reason in a particular text to understand it literally.

John cautions us to use the above principle in the very first verse of the book.

*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and **signified** it by His angel to His servant John (Rv 1:1).*

In the first verse, John alerts us to interpret this book in a manner that is different than the interpretation of most of the books of the rest of the Bible. The book of Revelation was “**signified**” to John who recorded the symbols for the readers to interpret.

Many of the symbols that John used are taken

from the Old Testament. Others are derived from the historical setting of the audience to whom the book was first written. It is not difficult for us to understand the symbols that were taken from the Old Testament. However, it is often quite challenging for us to understand those symbols that are taken from the circumstances that surrounded the audience to whom John wrote.

**a. Cryptic symbols:** John often uses **cryptic** symbols. These are unreal, and often terrifying symbols that are used in order to shock the readers into attention. The original readers understood the meaning of these symbols. We live over two thousand years removed from the historical setting of the original readers, and thus, our understanding of the cryptic symbols is somewhat limited. We must keep this in mind as we interpret our way through this book.

**b. Apocalyptic literature:** The book is also what is classified as **apocalyptic literature**. This was a style of literature that was written **to conceal the message of the writer from the unbeliever, but reveal a message of encouragement and hope to the believer**. Through the skillful use of figures, the Holy Spirit in revelation conveyed an encouraging message to the original readers who were headed for times of great social chaos.

**c. Figurative use of numbers:** In reference to numbers that are used by John in the book, John resorts to a figurative use of numbers. This was a common practice of the Jews. They often used numbers to convey ideas. In order to remain consistent with the figurative tenor of the book, **the careful interpreter will thus first interpret the numbers of Revelation in a figurative sense**. John used numbers as three, four, seven, ten, twelve and the multiples thereof (100, 1,000, 1,200 or 144,000) in a symbolic sense. For example, the number **three** was associated with certain acts of God (See Ex 19:11 Hs 6:2). **Four** signified completion or the whole of creation (See Is 11:12; Jr 49:36; Ez 37:9; Rv 6:1-8; 7:1; 9:15). The



number **seven** signified completeness or perfection (See Mt 12:45; 22:25-28). The number **ten** and its multiples (100, 1,000) represented a consummated period of time (See Rv 7:4; 20:4-7).

In the symbolism of the book of Revelation, it is vital that the interpreter recognize the symbolic use of numbers that John used throughout the letter. What has been the fault of many modern-day speculators is the fact that they have turned on their calculators and computers in an effort to compute some literal time period of John's symbolic use of the numbers. Such is an unfortunate practice and one that has led many to be confused concerning the message of the letter.

## **2.Shortly to come to pass:**

**The events of Revelation were to shortly come to pass.** John again alerted those who would read this book that the historical events about which he spoke in the revelation would soon take place. In chapter 1, verse 1 he initially alerted his readers *“... that God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place ....”* He concluded the revelations in 22:6 with a second caution: *“And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.”*

What could be more clear than this? The events of the book, therefore, must first be interpreted to apply to the historical context of the first readers. John does talk about the end of things, but his primary emphasis in the book is to reveal to the first readers those things that would bring persecution into their lives, for they were headed into an era of Roman government persecution.

**“Shortly take place” does not mean that these events would take place over two thousand years later.** Therefore, any effort on the part of interpreters to twist out of historical context the events about which John prophesied is an unfortunate attempt to make the message comply with some of the present religious speculations that are handed around among modern-day theologians. When John said that they

would shortly take place, then he meant that **they would take place sometime in the immediate future of the disciples to whom he wrote.**

### **3.No Bible contradictions:**

**The Bible does not contradict itself.** Another important principle to remember in studying any figurative portion of Scripture is that **one often does not have to understand the figures that are used in order to understand a erroneous interpretation that is made of a particular scripture.** One may not fully understand all the book of Revelation. However, **if someone develops a theology from the book that contradicts other clear statements in the Bible, then we know that the interpretation is false.** It is false simply because the Bible does not contradict itself. Therefore, we must not read Revelation in a manner that would make it contradict itself. If we do, then we have made the Holy Spirit reveal contradictory messages to the disciples of Jesus.

### **4.A message of encouragement.**

The Christians to whom John wrote were in, and going into, a state of persecution. However, the persecution would become worse before it became better. The first readers had just passed through the neurotic persecution of Nero in the 60s. However, they were headed for the Roman State persecution that would take place during the reign of Domitian. Nero unleashed a personal vendetta against Christians. However, by the time of Domitian, the Roman State declare Christianity to be an illegal religion. Christians were subsequently persecuted to the extent that they were driven to an underground existence for many years.

Jesus knew that His people were headed in the direction of state persecution. He thus revealed through John a message of encouragement. The encouragement of John is revealed in the key verse of 17:14: ***“These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and***

*King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.”*

From the beginning of the document to the end, John’s assurance was that the believer will overcome. Therefore, the Lamb promises, *“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rv 2:10). The saints’ knowledge that the Lamb overcame in the past is an encouragement to help them endure the suffering that was coming in living the life of a disciple in the near future.

## B. Foundational Concepts

The above principles of interpretation bring us to the commonly misinterpreted chapter of Revelation 20. This chapter must first be interpreted figuratively, unless there is reason to understand the context literally. This principle of interpretation is in harmony with what John forewarned interpreters in the beginning of the book (See Rv 1:1).

In order to emphasize this principle, a good exercise to do in reference to Revelation 20:1-6 is to draw a line down the middle of a page. At the top of the page, write “literal” on one side of the line and “figurative” on the other side. Now read through the chapter, writing on one side or the other what you believe to be either literal or figurative. This simple exercise will at least prove one thing: **Those who want to make this chapter of revelation literal in every sense cannot be consistent in their interpretation.** For example, interpreters will often identify the “dragon” as a figure, but will literalize the “one thousand years.” They will make the “chain” figurative, but literalize the “one thousand years.” They claim that the “key” is figurative, but the “one thousand years” is literal.

What we must emphasize is the fact that **we should be consistent in our interpretation of this chapter.** One problem with the premillennial interpretation of this chapter is that premillennialists cannot be consistent in their interpretation of the language John used in the chapter. They go back and forth from literal to figurative, and from figurative to literal. In this

confusion of jumping back and forth in interpretation, they confuse their readers.

With the above thoughts in mind, the following is a brief interpretative foundation for understanding Revelation 20. We focus on these foundational concepts of the chapter in order to interpret the what John was revealing concerning the nature of the present gospel reign of King Jesus.

**1. Satan is bound (Rv 20:1-3):** In the first three verses a messenger of God is pictured with authority (key) to use a means of confinement (chain) to restrict Satan to a certain realm (bottomless pit, or abyss). The confinement of Satan began with the ministry of Jesus. Jesus said, *“Or else how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house”* (Mt 12:29).

Jesus came that *“He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Hb 2:14,15; see 1 Co 15:20-24). During His ministry, Jesus not only proclaimed that He was the resurrection and the life (See Jn 11:25,26), but also that He came to be the sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (See Jn 1:29). He came to manifest His authority over all things that He would exercise when He ascended to the right hand of the Father. He was the strong man who despoiled the house of Satan by dying on the cross. That strong man is still bound.

When Jesus received the seventy disciples He had sent out on a preaching tour, they return and said to Him, *“Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name”* (Lk 10:17). Jesus then responded, *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you”* (Lk 10:18,19). It was on the foundation of this authority that the work of Satan was crumbling during the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus proclaimed, *“Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast down”* (Jn 12:31). Jesus came to disarm Satan. He came to cast him down; to despoil his kingdom of darkness. Jesus thus *“disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in” the cross* (Cl 2:15).

When Jesus died on the cross, the confinement of Satan was sealed. **Within the body of Christ, Satan has no victory.** Satan goes about as a roaring lion in the world (See 1 Pt 5:8). However, among God’s people he is bound by the power of the blood of the Lamb (See 1 Jn 1:7). He is shut up and sealed.

In reference to the church, what Paul said in Romans 8:37-39 is true.

*Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, or any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**We now live in the age of the confinement of Satan.** This is the gospel age, for Satan is confined by the power of the gospel. If Satan is now confined in this time by the power of Jesus’ blood, how can he be more confined in some age to come? The only thing that now awaits Satan and his angels is destruction (See Mt 25:41). He is not headed for more confinement. He is headed for destruction. **This age is, therefore, the designated period of confinement, the one thousand years where the saints reign over the power of Satan by the blood of the Lamb** (See Rv 17:14).

**2. The resurrection and reign of the saints (Rv 20:4-6):** Thrones in this passage are symbolic of **authority** and **royalty**. When one is raised from the waters of baptism, he or she is resurrected to walk in newness of life (See Rm 6:3-5). **This is the first resurrection.** Those who have participated in this first resurrection with Jesus will also reign in this life

with Christ (See Rm 5:17). *“For if we died with Him [in baptism], we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him”* (2 Tm 2:11). Christians have crucified themselves with Christ (See Rm 6:6; Gl 2:20). They have died to themselves. They buried the old man of sin. Because they have died with Christ, they also live with him. It is this group about whom John revealed, *“And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years”* (Rv 20:4). The second death of eternal separation from God has no power over them (See Rv 20:6).

We must keep in mind that the “reigning” in verse 4 **is speaking of the reign of the saints**. Simply because the passage says the saints reigned with Christ for a thousand years **does not mean that the reign of Christ is limited to the thousand years**. All that is emphasized is the reign of the saints for the thousand years, not the reign of Christ for a thousand years, though He is now reigning from heaven.

The context of Revelation 20:4-6 speaks of a spiritual resurrection (resurrection from the waters of baptism), and the assumption of a second resurrection (the bodily resurrection) at the end of time when Jesus comes again.

In the context of **John 5:24-29, Jesus also spoke of both a spiritual and physical resurrection**.

Jesus said in the John 5 context that those who believe on Him have *“passed from death to life”* (Jn 5:24). This refers to a spiritual resurrection from a state of being spiritually dead to a state of being saved. Jesus continued, *“I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live”* (Jn 5:25). Those who would live are those who would hear and obey the gospel by immersion for the remission of their sins (See At 2:38; Rm 6:3-6).

In verses 28 & 29 of John 5, **Jesus changed from the spiritual resurrection to a physical resurrection that would take place in the future**. *“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those*

*who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.*” Those who have worked that which is good will be resurrected to life. They will also be resurrected at the same time as those who have worked evil, but will be resurrected to condemnation. Both resurrections, according to this statement of Jesus, will take place in the **same hour**.

John 5:24-29, therefore, **is a commentary on what John symbolically reveals in Revelation 20:1-6**. Jesus came to preach to those who were spiritually dead in their sins. Those who heard could in their lives bind Satan by their obedience to the gospel. In Christ, therefore, they were protected from the power of Satan, for in Christ we are not allowed to be tempted beyond that which we are able to endure, but with temptation we are given a way of escape (See 1 Co 10:13). Satan is bound in the realm into which the Christian has come through the blood of Jesus. As long as one remains in this realm, he or she will not suffer the second death, that is, eventual destruction from the presence of God (See Rv 2:11; 20:14; 21:8; 2 Th 1:7-9).

The key statement that helps us understand Revelation 20 is **verse 6**. Once this verse is understood in the context of the work of Jesus and the obedience of the saints, there is no problem in understanding that the context of Revelation 20 refers to the present “one thousand year” era that began with the atonement of Jesus and will conclude with Jesus’ final coming. This is the age (millennium) of the gospel. The following would be a narrative commentary of what John revealed in verse 6:

**The ones who have obeyed the gospel are blessed and sanctified because they have been raised from the waters of baptism in order to walk in newness of life. They are no longer spiritually dead, and will not suffer the second death at the final judgment. They are presently priests of God and Christ. They presently reign with Jesus during this dispensation of the gospel.**

**3. Satan is crushed (Rv 20:7-10):** In the context of the historical situation of the audience to whom John wrote, Christians were suffering the persecution of the Roman government. Satan was using the state of Rome to suppress the work of God in the lives of Christians. In the symbolism, **Gog** and **Magog**, who are figures taken from the Old Testament (See Ez 35-40), are shown here to be the enemies of the church (the beloved city). **John pictured the deceived at the end of the gospel dispensation as composing the vast majority of the world.** However, Satan's release from prison is only for a brief period of time in reference to time. His time is swiftly ended and he and his angels are cast into destruction (See Mt 25:41). Keep in mind that Satan's release from prison is symbolic of releasing those earthly influences and earthly government powers that are his instruments of temptation and persecution.

During their suffering in this world, Christians must never forget the statements of Paul in **Romans 8:37-39**, and similar promises that we cannot be subjectively snatched from the power of God. Christians must always remember what Jesus promised His disciples: ***"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, neither will anyone snatch them out of My hand"*** (Jn 10:27,28).

While under persecution, John reminded the early Christians that the **Beast** (the Roman State) and **False Prophet** (State religion) will see their end (See Rv 17:9,18; 18:2). The church will eventually emerge from Rome's persecution. Though the saints spiritually reign with Christ, and do so throughout the gospel millennium, they are again headed for a time of persecution. However, as the three and a half years of the Beast were short (12:12; 13:4), so will Satan's onslaught against the saints be short in the end. And the fact that it will be short is encouragement to the saints that whatever Satan does against the work of the Lamb in this world will only be temporary.

**4. Final judgment is in the end (Rv 20:11-15):**



The vision of Revelation 20 pictured the beginning of the gospel dispensation by the work of Jesus and the preaching of the gospel. John also pictures the end of the gospel dispensation by a vision of judgment. He revealed what Paul proclaimed in Acts 17:31: *“He has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the Man who He has ordained”* (See also Mt 25:31-46; Jn 5:22). John revealed **the last day**. It was a day of judgment (See Jn 5:22; 12:48; 2 Co 5:10; 2 Tm 4:1). It was a day of termination of this present world (See 2 Pt 3:10-13). No one will escape this final judgment (See Rv 6:14; 16:20; 18:21; 19:20; 2 Co 5:10).

What John pictures in the last few verses of Revelation 20 is **a time of finality**. It is a time of termination of world events. There is no picture of earthly history after the events of verses 11-15.

Consistent interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6, therefore, will not allow time for a supposed period of a physical one-thousand year reign of Jesus on this earth. The context is discussing what has already occurred in reference to the binding of Satan, not what will happen after Jesus comes again. If the one-thousand year reign of the saints in Revelation 20:1-6 is supposed to be a future event, then one would suppose that many future events, particularly those that are assumed by premillennialists, would be mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6. But consider the following list. These are **concepts that are not found in the context of Revelation 20:1-6** that premillennialists say surround the physical millennium:

#### TEACHINGS NOT FOUND IN REVELATION 20

1. Nothing is said of Jesus being on this literal earth.
2. Nothing is said of Jesus reigning on this literal earth.
3. Nothing is said of beheaded saints reigning on earth.
4. Nothing is said of the bodily resurrection.
5. Nothing is said of the final coming of Jesus.
6. Nothing is said of the literal throne of David.
7. Nothing is said of the city of Jerusalem in Palestine.
8. Nothing is said of the Jews as a nation of people.

It would seem that if Revelation 20:1-6 were to be the major proof text for a supposed earthly reign of Jesus that is yet to come in the future, then certainly the above major teachings would be mentioned in this key text. The fact that these major teachings are not in the text of Revelation 20:1-6 indicates that we should not use the text to prove something that is not there. If the earthly reign teaching is not in the text with reference to the one-thousand year reign of the saints, then it would be right to conclude that whatever one's interpretation of the millennium would be, it does not refer to something that is yet in the future. Revelation 20 cannot be a proof text for that which it does not mention. And it cannot prove the teaching of some earthly reign of Jesus in the future simply because the primary concepts of this supposed teaching are not in its primary text.

Because of the figurative nature of Revelation, the Holy Spirit knew there would be those who would so interpret the book in order to advocate their own theologies. One can understand, therefore, why John gave the following warning at the close of the book of Revelation:

*For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to those things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. If anyone will take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part out of the tree of life, and out of the holy city and the things that are written in this book* (Rv 22:18,19).

### Chapter 3

#### • EXPOSITION OF REVELATION 20 •

As noted in the previous chapter, Revelation 20 is probably one of the most misunderstood chapters in the entire Bible. Interpreters have scrambled to the verses of this chapter with preconceived ideas, especially the teaching that Jesus will in the end give up His present gospel reign over the entire universe in order to settle for a minimal reign on this one planet

on which we presently reside. Unfortunately, those who promote this teaching fail to understand the totality of the present gospel reign of King Jesus over all things.

In the apostasy from Christianity that took place during the 60s prior to the destruction of Jewish nationalism in A.D. 70, some early Christians could not understand the totality of Jesus' reign over all things, especially during a time of Roman state persecution into which they were headed. In opposition to this lack of faith in the totality of the gospel reign of King Jesus, the Hebrew writer, therefore, reminded his readers of a very important point in reference to Jesus' existing reign:

*You [the Father] have put **all things** in subjection under His feet. For in subjecting all things to Him, **He left nothing that is not put under Him**. But now we do not yet see all things put under Him (Hb 2:8).*

Though we do not at this time see all things in submission to King Jesus, we must not allow ourselves to believe that He is not now King of kings and Lord of lords (See 1 Tm 6:15). To believe that Jesus is presently reigning over a limited group of people on this earth is to marginalize the present sovereignty of our King over all things, including the galaxies of the heavens. Those who have obeyed the gospel are the body of His church. But Jesus' kingdom reign extends far beyond the fellowship of obedient subjects.

*Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name [authority] that is **above every name** [authority], that at the name [authority] of Jesus every knee **should** bow, of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the earth, and that every tongue **should** confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Ph 2:9-11).*

This is precisely what Daniel prophesied of the Son of God in **Daniel 7:13,14**. When Jesus eventually ascended on high, He was given sovereignty over all things (See Mt 20:18). Every knee should now confess to His kingship, but they will not. Nevertheless, the Father exalted the Son ...

... **far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name [authority] that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church** (Ep 1:21,22).

If one has a difficult time understanding the preceding statements of the Holy Spirit in reference to the present gospel reign of King Jesus, then he or she has a limited understanding of the present kingdom of Jesus. If one's mind is centered on future carnal things of this world, then things that are totally contrary to that on which Christians should focus in this life are minimized. It would be good to remind ourselves of the following exhortation of the Holy Spirit:

***If you then were raised with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth*** (Cl 3:1,2).

It is difficult to understand why some seek to reverse this admonition. Instead of keeping our minds focused on that which is above, some would have us set our minds on things of this earth when Jesus comes again.

But if one has carnal hopes, then his or her mind is not focused on heavenly things, but on earthly things. Such is contrary to the focus about which the Spirit encouraged us to have in the preceding statement. In having our minds focused on those things that are above, we must bring this focus into our interpretation of the text of Revelation 20.

John used in Revelation 20 prophetic figurative language in order to rehearse the impact the gospel had on the work of the kingdom of darkness. This seventh and last symbolic vision of John is given to manifest the final victory of good over the spiritual powers of darkness.

This vision begins with the revelation of the gospel. It concludes with the final judgment, consummation of all things, and our journey unto eternity. In one

chapter, John gives a truly splendid picture of what this dispensation of the gospel is all about. It is a thrilling vision and revelation of what the early Christians experienced because of the preaching of the gospel. It is a comforting vision because of the revelation of what will be the end of those who set themselves against the gospel.

In Revelation 12 — 14 **John gave an expanded picture of the beginning of the gospel dispensation.** He continued to the end of each vision unto the time that the Son of Man was told, *“Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe”* (Rv 14:15). In chapter 20 we begin with the binding power of the gospel when it was first introduced into the world. The vision ends with the time when those who were *“not found written in the Book of Life”* were cast into the lake of fire (Rv 20:15).

Revelation 20 is a marvelous picture in figurative language of the power of the gospel in this world from beginning to end. If we would assign the events of this chapter to a time that is yet to come, then we cheat ourselves of one of the greatest texts of revelation in the Scriptures that comforts those who now seek to live the gospel in this world. It would be good in the last chapter of this book to go through the text of Revelation 20 in a verse by verse as a reminder that we now live in the glorious gospel millennium that was initiated at the cross by the sacrificial Lamb of God and continues to this day.

### **Verse 1**

#### **Messenger With Authority**

*And I saw an **angel** coming down from heaven, having the **key** to the **abyss** and a great **chain** in his hand.*

The **angel** is simply a messenger of God. He came with the power to confine. That which confined the work of Satan was **the gospel of Jesus**. As the woman brought forth the Man Child (Jesus) in chapter

12, so the result of Jesus' coming (the gospel) is emphasized here. In view of what Jesus said during His earthly ministry in preparation for the cross, it is not difficult to understand what John meant in this verse: *“Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out”* (Jn 12:31).

The **key** is symbolic of authority. This figure is taken from the Old Testament in passages as Isaiah 22:20-22. Eliakim was given the “key” of the house of David. He *“will open and no one will shut; and he will shut, and no one will open”* (Compare also Mt 16:18,19; Rv 1:18; 3:7,8). This messenger, therefore, had the authority to bind the works of Satan with the power of the gospel (See Rm 1:16). Jesus was the messenger from heaven who journeyed into this world with the gospel of salvation (See Ph 2:5-8). He then sent His messengers into all the world to reap the harvest of receptive souls, and thus, release them from the bondage of sin and Satan (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). This was the purpose of Jesus sending His messengers into all the world with the message of the gospel (See Mt 24:31).

The **bottomless pit** of the *King James Version* would literally be translated “abyss” (See Lk 8:31; Rv 9:1; 11:7; 17:8). The abyss is confinement. It is the confinement of the power of Satan. The *King James Version* translators wanted to interpret the abyss with a meaning that illustrated the endless confinement of Satan. The pit thus has no bottom. Satan is thrown in and never hits the bottom. His confinement is sure and everlasting. His destruction will eventually be terminal (See Mt 25:41) The “ruler of this world” was cast down by the power of the gospel (See Jn 12:31).

Satan is restrained with a **chain**. Here is that which confines him to his limits. Angels who kept not their original habitation, but were disobedient, have been *“reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day”* (Jd 6; see 2 Pt 2:4). Jesus said, *“Or else how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first*

***binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house”*** (Mt 12:29).

During His ministry, Jesus began the binding of the strong man, Satan, and plundering his house when people responded to the message of the gospel. By His miraculous works and preaching of the good news, Jesus was confining the work of Satan in this world. In this sense, therefore, Satan was being cast down in a world that he formerly controlled by deception.

Satan can now only go about as a roaring lion seeking those who would submit to the temptation of his pleas (See 1 Pt 5:8). However, for all those who hear and obey the gospel, he has been bound from touching them.

## **Verse 2**

### **Binding Of Satan**

***And he laid hold of the dragon, that old serpent who is the Devil and Satan. And he bound him for a thousand years.***

The **dragon** was that fictitious creature who was to cause fear in the hearts of people. The **serpent** was a cunning deceiver. The **devil** is the accuser. **All such metaphors portray a grim picture of Satan as the perfect enemy of humanity.** Nevertheless, Satan is bound with the power of the truth of the gospel.

Jesus died for our sins that cause spiritual death in the lives of all people (Rm 6:23; 1 Co 15:3). However, He was resurrected in order that ...

***... He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”*** (Hb 2:14,15; see 1 Co 15:20-22).

Satan is **bound**. In chapter 12:1-9, the dragon, Satan, was cast out of his place of authority. He was cast down. The same picture is stated here. Jesus said, ***“Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast down”*** (Jn 12:31). The word

“now” refers to the work of Jesus’ ministry. While in His incarnate state in this world, Jesus was in the process of beginning the casting down of the prince of the world. He visually manifested such by giving to His disciples control over the supernatural. His disciples in turn manifested their power over Satan by also casting out demons. After Jesus had sent them out on a particular preaching tour, they returned and said, *“Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name”* (Lk 10:17). Such was a demonstration of greater things to come in the lives of the disciples when Jesus ascended on high. Jesus then said,

*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will by any means hurt you* (Lk 10:18,19).

Through the cross, people can be delivered from the bondage of sin. Through the resurrection, they can be delivered from death by sin, and thus, have the opportunity of living forever. Therefore, Jesus *“disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it [the cross]”* (Cl 2:15). King Jesus now has sovereignty over all the works of Satan (See Ep 1:20-23). Through one’s obedience to the gospel, he or she, too, can *“reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ”* (Rm 5:17).

Since it is by the gospel that Satan is bound, **then we conclude that the binding began when the gospel was first made effective in the lives of those who believed in Jesus.** That time was when the first official announcement of the incarnation, atoning death, burial, resurrection, ascension and gospel millennium of Jesus was publicly proclaimed on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

The binding of Satan will continue as long as the gospel is preached and obeyed. It will be preached until Jesus comes again. Therefore, we would conclude that the **one thousand years** of binding began in Acts 2 and will continue until Jesus returns. **This is the definite, but indeterminate time, of the**



## one thousand years.

The number “one thousand” is only figurative of this period of confinement of the power of Satan. This figure is taken from the Old Testament where such referred to a definite time, but not determined by a specific number of years (See Ps 90:4; 105:8; Dn 7:10). This is how the Jewish Christians would have interpreted the “one thousand years” when John initially wrote this message.

### Verse 3

#### Confinement Of Satan

*Then he cast him into the **abyss** and **shut him up**, and set a seal on him so that **he should not deceive the nations anymore** until the thousand years were finished. And after that he must be released for a little time.*

Satan was **shut up**. Jesus' binding was thus effective. Satan was also **sealed**, that is, authoritatively consigned to the abyss by the gospel. He would no longer have the freedom to lead masses of people into darkness by deception since there existed the light of the gospel that was going into all the world.

**The influence of the gospel would permeate the very constitutions of nations with values that would preserve societies.** The whole earth would not be led astray in mass deception as in the days of Noah when every imagination of man's heart was continually evil (See Gn 6:5).

Before the preaching of the gospel, there was once a time when humanity as a whole gave up the knowledge of God in order to worship the creation (See Rm 1:18-32). But the gospel brought life and immortality to light (See 2 Tm 1:10). As long as humanity has the light of the gospel, God will stay the destruction of the world until all has been fulfilled.

The binding of Satan by the gospel does not mean the cessation of the activity of Satan. Within the realm of those who have obeyed the gospel, however, he is bound. He goes about outside that realm—the realm

of the knowledge of and preaching of the gospel—as a devouring lion (See 1 Pt 5:8). However, wherever the gospel is preached, he is confined. Where it is not preached, he deceives and devours.

God will not allow Satan to tempt the saints beyond what they are able to endure (See 1 Co 10:13). In this sense, therefore, Satan is bound. However, he goes about as a devouring lion among those to whom the gospel is not yet preached, or those who have given up on the gospel (See Hb 2:1-4). John wanted his readers to be comforted, however, that Satan's work is bound by the gospel that they had obeyed and in which they lived.

If Satan is bound within the area where the gospel is preached and lived, then he is unleashed in the lives of those who are not standing upon the foundation of the gospel (Compare Hb 10:26,27,39). This is certainly in the meaning of Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian saints when he wrote concerning their **belief in the gospel**, *“by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you”* (1 Co 15:3). The Corinthians had to continue believing the testimony of the gospel if they were to continue in a saved relationship with God. The recipients of the Hebrew letter had to remain faithful to their belief in the gospel lest they shrink back into destruction (See Hb 10:39).

John seems to indicate that there would be a brief time when some in his audience would cease believing in the power of the gospel. When the saints cease believing in the gospel, Satan is unleashed. This seems to be the purpose for which the entire book of Hebrews was written. This would be the context of the letter of Hebrews in which the Holy Spirit sought to convince some saints not to turn from the gospel reign and priesthood of King Jesus. The Hebrew writer warned, *“How will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation”* (Hb 2:3). If some *“crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame,”* then Satan is allowed back into their lives (Hb 6:6). So the Hebrew writer exhorted, *“Let us hold*

*firm to the confession of our faith without wavering, for He is faithful who promised” (Hb 10:23). He then warned, “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth [of the gospel], there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (Hb 10:26).*

A second understanding of this “loosening” would be in reference to the end of time. Satan would be loosed for a **little season**. If he is bound by the preaching of the gospel, then at the end of this gospel dispensation **he would be loosed when the gospel is not preached**. Could this be a brief time before the end when the saints have lost their mission of preaching the gospel, or the gospel is suppressed in persecution to the point that the saints cease preaching the gospel?

We do know that **the purpose for the existence of this world is to produce souls for eternal dwelling in a heavenly environment**. So when this world ceases to produce gospel-obedient people for heavenly dwelling, **then it has ceased in its purpose for existence**. It is certain, therefore, that God will take away this world of ungodliness.

## **Verse 4**

### **Reign Of The Saints**

*And I saw **thrones** and those who sat on them. Judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast nor his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads nor on their hands. **And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.***

The **thrones** were kingly seats upon which the saints sat and reigned with the power of the gospel. This is a place of royalty. In this verse, such authority and royalty was given to two groups of the saints: **(1)** There were the martyrs who had given their lives to the preaching the gospel. They continued to live and reign in the world through the testimony of their

legacy. They were as Abel who continues to speak, though he is dead (See Hb 11:4).

(2) There were the living saints who refused to be identified with the worship of the Roman Empire. These were those of Revelation 13:16-19 who received great persecution because of their stand for the truth of the gospel. They overcame the beast *“by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death”* (Rv 12:11).

Those who did not submit to the religion of emperor worship that was promoted by Rome, **lived** because of their gospel living (See Rm 6:4,5). They reigned with Jesus in this gospel dispensation (See Rm 5:17). Paul wrote, *“For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him. If we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us”* (2 Tm 2:11,12). Christians have both died with Jesus (See Rm 6:6), and thus, they endure with Him in this life (See At 14:22).

While on earth Jesus said to the apostles, *“Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”* (Mt 19:28). The “time of regeneration” is the same as the “one thousand years.” It is the time when the apostles rule through the power of the gospel they preach. This gospel brings judgment to those who do not receive and obey it (See 2 Th 1:6-9). Through the preaching of the gospel, therefore, Christians bring judgment to those who reject it.

## **Verse 5**

### **The First Resurrection**

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

This is the key verse that helps us understand the meaning of the entire chapter. We assume from the **first resurrection** that there was a first death. This would be spiritual death in sin (See Is 59:1,2; Rm 5:12;

6:23). When Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, he spiritually died (See Gn 2:17). When every person reaches the age at which he or she can determine that which is rebellion against God, and subsequently chooses rebellion, he or she sins, and thus dies spiritually (See Rm 5:12). This is the one who “lives in pleasure,” but is dead while he or she lives (See 1 Tm 5:6; Mt 8:22). The first resurrection, therefore, is a spiritual resurrection from spiritual death (See Rm 6:3-6; Ep 2:5,6; Cl 2:12,13). The one who partakes of the spiritual resurrection has *“passed from death to life”* (1 Jn 3:14).

The first resurrection implies a second. Though the first is spiritual, it is the condition for the second that will be bodily. Jesus passed from talking about the spiritual resurrection to the bodily resurrection in the context of **John 5:24-29**. In verse 24 he stated that the one who believes has *“passed from death to life.”* He explained, *“I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live”* (Jn 5:25). In this context, Jesus was discussing a spiritual resurrection. However, in John 5:28,29, He turned to the bodily resurrection at the end of time. He stated, *“The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth”* (See also At 24:15; Rm 8:11; 1 Co 15).

In Revelation 20, John said that the **rest of the dead**, that is, the spiritually dead, did not live until the end of the one thousand years. This would be the time explained by Jesus in John 5:28,29. The spiritually dead would be resurrected to go away into eternal destruction (See Mt 25:46; 2 Th 1:9). Those who do not partake of the spiritual resurrection in life will be raised to face the judgment of destruction at the end of this world (See 2 Th 1:7-9).

## **Verse 6**

### **The Second Death**

*Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no*

*power. But they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with Him a thousand years.*

John speaks of the coming **second death** (See Rv 2:11; 20:14; 21:8). It is a destruction after due punishment has been pronounced and suffered by those who are presently dead spiritually because they refuse to obey the gospel. The second death will end in their destruction that has eternal consequences (See 2 Th 1:9).

Those who are obedient to the gospel, are made spiritually alive. They are priests of God and Christ (See 1 Pt 2:5,9; Rv 1:6; 5:10). They are reigning with Christ during this gospel dispensation (Rv 1:6; 5:10; Rm 5:17).

Those who partake of the first resurrection (obedience to the gospel), **reign** in life by their victory over sin. They have victory over death (See Hb 2:14,15). They were thus reigning on this earth **with Jesus** at the time John recorded this vision (See 2 Tm 2:12). This is what John had earlier written in **Revelation 5:10**: Jesus has *“made us kings and priests to our God; and we will reign on the earth.”* This is not a future carnal reign on this earth, but a present spiritual reign through the power of the gospel.

### **Verses 7,8** **Release Of Satan**

*And when the thousand years have ended, Satan will be released from his prison. And he will go out to deceive the nations who are in the **four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog**, to gather them together to battle. The number of them is like the **sand of the seashore.***

The beast, or Roman government, oppressed the saints. The period of oppression was earlier identified by John to be three and a half years in duration, though this time is not a specific three and a half years (Rv 12:12; 13:5). This was a “short time.” So,

will Satan's release be at the end of the one thousand years, or gospel dispensation? He will be released from confinement by the lack of the preaching of the gospel, or the suppression of gospel preaching by government powers. The majority of the inhabitants of the world will thus be deceived as they were during Roman oppression in the first century.

Satan will go forth to the **four corners of the earth**, that is, the entire world. **Gog** and **Magog** are references to God's enemies (See Ez 35-40). The battle is parallel with Armageddon of Revelation 16:16. At the end of the gospel dispensation the number of the deceived will be as the **sand of the sea**. In other words, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the world will be opposed to the truth of the gospel.

This may be a dim picture of the future. Nevertheless, most people today do not give heed to the gospel. This is especially true in the religious world today wherein the gospel is neither known nor preached. The gospel has a hard time penetrating those who are religiously self-righteous. Once one has created a religion after his or her own desires, the humility of the gospel of the incarnate Son of God has little appeal.

## Verse 9

### Deliverance Of The Beloved City

*So they 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.*

The **beloved city** is the church of the saints, the house of God, who have not submitted to the oppression of the beast of state religion. The end of the gospel dispensation will be a time when it seems that the saints will be oppressed out of existence. However, **fire**, or God's judgment will come upon those who oppress and persecute the people of God (See 2 Th 1:7-9; compare Jd 14,15). As God intervened in the days of Noah with the global flood to deliver righteous Noah and his family (See Gn 6), and in

the case of delivering righteous Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah (See Gn 18,19), so He will deliver those who remain faithful. Christians must never forget that no matter how oppressing things might become in this world, God will eventually deliver His people.

In the historical context of John's readers, reference is surely made to the state persecution of Rome, especially in the years to come after God wrote this message of comfort to the existing church. The enemies of God went throughout all their world (the Roman Empire) to encompass the saints. However, in a secondary sense, this has happened to the saints who have lived within the boundaries of unbelieving state governments since the days of the first century. In numerous places of the world, the saints have been suppressed out of existence. Such oppression continues to happen, but Christians must know that no matter how dire the persecution may become, there will be an eventual deliverance by God. This fact must bring assurance to every Christian, though some will succumb to the persecution.

**The imagery of John surely comes from the event of Sennacherib's threat against Jerusalem during the days of King Hezekiah** (See Is 36 & 37). The Assyrian army of Sennacherib had surrounded Jerusalem, the holy city. But in one night God destroyed the army of Sennacherib. The people of God were saved when God sent His angel to destroy in one night the entire army of the Assyrians.

In the case of the insurrectionist Jews in A.D. 70, the opposite was true. God did not deliver the Jews when the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands of the residents of the "holy city" were slaughtered, not delivered. Those to whom John wrote knew this. He knew that those who were held up in Jerusalem in A.D. 70 were those who had rejected the Son of God. They were those who had refused to hear and obey the gospel. But now John's readers have concluded that they are the obedient, and as God delivered the "holy city" during the days of Hezekiah, they too would be delivered.



## Verse 10

### Judgment Of Satan

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

Since the beast and false prophet are pictured here as already in the “lake of fire and brimstone,” then we must assume that this statement is in reference to final things. Rome and Roman religion have already been terminated from this earth and cast down to fire and brimstone. We are now waiting for the final judgment of the one who has caused all this wickedness, that is, the Devil and his angels (See Mt 24:41; Rm 9:22; 2 Th 1:6-9).

All the wicked will eventually hear the words of Jesus, *“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Mt 25:41). Hell is the intended place of punishment for Satan. All those who would be messengers of his cause will eventually end up in the same place and suffer the same punishment.

The severity of the punishment is manifested in the metaphor **fire and brimstone**. We do not make the mistake as some biblical interpreters by literalizing the metaphor. The metaphor “fire and brimstone” is something literal and of this world. In a metaphor, **that which is signified in the heavenly realm is always greater and above this world**. Therefore, we would assume that hell is more horrible than the literal fire and brimstone of this world.

By the time of the end of all things, the **beast** (Roman government) and the **false prophet** (Roman religion) will have already been cast into the place that is reserved for the Devil. John’s comfort to the righteous is that those who have tormented them will eventually be tormented in the end.

The duration of the torment is indefinite, though certain. It is **everlasting** in the sense that God has appointed it to happen. It will not be taken away. As

in the Old Testament, the words “everlasting” and “forever” carry with them the Jewish understanding that the torment will last throughout God’s intended time of duration. Emphasis is not on the length of time, **but on the certainty of the punishment’s existence** (See the use of these words in Ex 12:24; 29:9; 40:15; Lv 3:17; Dt 15:17; Ja 14:9; I Kg 8:12,13; 2 Kg 5:27; see also Volume 48,49 of Shelf 5 of the **Library** of roger-e-dickson.org).

## **Verse 11**

### **The Great White Throne**

*And 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.*

The Father has given all judgment into the hands of the Son. *“He has appointed a day on which He [the Father] will judge the world in righteousness by the Man [Jesus] whom He has ordained”* (At 17:31). *“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son”* (Jn 5:22).

Since Jesus will *“judge the living and the dead at His appearing”* (2 Tm 4:1), all people of this world must submit to the truth of His gospel, for Jesus said of those who reject Him, *“the word [of the gospel] that I have spoken will judge him in the last day”* (Jn 12:48).

Though people seek to **flee** from the judgment to come, there will be no escape. All must stand before the judgment seat of Christ in order *“that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Co 5:10; see Rv 6:14; 16:20; 18:21; 19:20).

## **Verse 12**

### **Judgment Of The Righteous**

*Then I saw the dead, small and great, stand before the throne. And the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things*

*that were written in the books, according to their works.*

This verse possibly refers to the resurrection and final consignment of the saints to the eternal dwelling of the new heavens and earth (See 2 Pt 3:13). The following verse 13 undoubtedly refers to the final judgment of the wicked. Regardless of this interpretation, both verses confirm what is taught throughout the New Testament. **Everyone will be raised from the dead for the final judgment** (See Ec 3:14-17; Jn 5:28,29; 2 Co 5:10).

John records that **books** were opened. Such is possibly a reference to Daniel's vision of the judgment in Daniel 7:10: *"The court was seated, and the books were opened."* The metaphor here could be from the "book of remembrance" in the Old Testament that was a record of the righteous (See Mt 3:16). It could also refer to a metaphorical record of the deeds and character of the unrighteous spoken by Isaiah (See Is 30:8,9). Reference could also include the Old Testament (See Lk 24:25; Jn 5:39; 10:35) or the New Testament (See Jn 12:48).

The names of citizens of Roman cities were inscribed in a "book of life." John used this book in a metaphorical manner in order to indicate the listing of the saved who were destined for heaven (See Ps 69:28; Is 4:3; Lk 10:20; Ph 4:3; Rv 3:5; 13:8; 21:27). God certainly does not need a literal book in which to write a list of the saved. The One who knows every hair of our head can certainly call each of us by name. The metaphor, therefore, signifies that God knows exactly those who are His.

The elect will be saved by grace (See Ep 2:8,9). Christians are not saved as the result of perfect keeping of law. However, *"we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"* (Ep 2:10). We would say, therefore, that it is by these works that we will be judged because the works reveal our response to the grace of God. Christians must

respond to the grace of God in their lives by walking in the light of the gospel of Jesus. James warned, *“Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”* (Js 2:17; see Ec 3:17; Hb 4:13).

### Verse 13

#### Judgment Of The Wicked

*Then the 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 every one according to their works.*

John emphasizes that no one individual of the wicked masses of the world will escape the final judgment. The beast (the wicked of Rome) and the false prophet (Roman religion) will all be judged. As in other uses of the word “sea” through Revelation, the **sea** refers to the masses of humanity from which the wicked persecutors of the saints have come (See Rv 13:1; 16:3; 21:1). They will all face the judgment.

**Death** and **hades** will deliver up those who are in them. Death and hades go together because hades is the abode of the souls and spirits of the dead. Even if the wicked have died, they will be resurrected in order to stand in judgment before God. In this “end-of-time” picture, John also wants us to know that the termination of physical death is coming.

### Verse 14

#### End Of Physical Death

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

When Jesus comes again, physical death will be no more. Therefore, there will be no more need for a place to reserve the souls and spirits of the dead. Physical death and the abode of the dead will be cast into the **lake of fire**, or place of termination. This is the **second death**, or second time in the existence of the wicked that they have been separated from God. In physical death, one’s physical life stops. Likewise, in

the second death, one's spiritual existence terminates in hell after just punishment has been carried out. The wicked on earth will be sentenced to their just punishment that was incurred by their disobedience.

## Verse 15

### Destiny Of The Wicked

*And whoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

This statement certainly emphasizes the point that one has his or her name recorded among the saved. Jesus will eventually say to the disobedient, *"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* (Mt 7:23; see Mt 25:41). It will certainly be a sad day when the unrighteous hear these words of departure from the One they resisted throughout their lives.

In this final vision, John's visionary picture of the gospel dispensation is complete. He has taken us in vision from the time the gospel was first announced on Pentecost in A.D. 30, to the termination of all things. In this particular picture he wants the righteous to know that the wicked persecutors of the saints will not escape the final judgment. Therefore, the saints must be patient, for vengeance belongs to God who will repay (See Rm 12:19; see Rv 13:10).

#### ABREVIATIONS

##### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

##### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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