

## **about this booklet**

The primary question is this, Is our eschatology and our view of the millennium such that in this present age we can proclaim Christs present victory over -all evil, and to that extent and degree that men and women will know them- selves to be liberated from the power of Satan and sin, and believe they can “reign in life by one Christ Jesus”, or must the statement of that victory always be tempered with a caution of “Ah yes, but the victory is as yet not complete. It is only a provisional victory. Satan still has great power, and sin and the flesh can fell a believer at any time.”

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# The Matter of the Millennium

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Geoffrey Bingham

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the  
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Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while.

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgement was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Revelation 20:1-10

# ***The Matter of the Millennium***

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## **Christ the Meaning of History<sup>1</sup>**

If we would understand the millennium we cannot properly understand it by commencing our study directly from the 20th chapter of the Book of the Revelation of John the Seer. It is virtually impossible to understand that chapter unless we have reasonably traversed the previous 19 chapters, and then go on to understand the 21st and 22nd chapters. What is more, we must study and know this material in detail for the whole Book of the Revelation is the setting of the millennium. Even more, the Scriptures as a whole are its full setting. A piecemeal study of the millennium which takes its beginning in the 20th chapter is inadequate. The whole Book is a full prophecy of Christ (Rev. 1:3, 11; 22:18, 19). Since ‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’<sup>2</sup> we must realize that all history takes its

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<sup>1</sup> This is the title of a book by Hendrikus Berkhof (Baker, 1979) and is an excellent treatment of the subject.

<sup>2</sup> This statement—‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’—is capable of a number of interpretations such as (i) ‘the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy’, i.e. the Spirit testifies to Jesus through the prophets or wherever there is prophecy (cf. Luke 24:26, 27, 44–49), (ii) that the testimony which Jesus gives to the truth (John 18:37) and to the Father is

meaning from Christ the Son.<sup>3</sup> Only then can we proceed to discuss the millennium.

### What is the Millennium?

What do we mean by the millennium, especially as it is set forth in Revelation chapter 20? A millennium is one thousand years, and that is how it is represented in the chapter mentioned. For some it is an actual time—one thousand years or ten centuries. For others, who would quote Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8, the length of time is not important, since a day can be as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. For yet others, what seems to be a time span is not a time situation but an action or ‘power’ situation.

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the essence of prophecy, (iii) the testimony of Jesus is given by the people of God as they are aided by the Spirit (Rev. 1:2, 9; 4:9; 12:11, 17; 19:10; 20:4) and such is the thrust or meaning of prophecy (cf. Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17–18), (iv) the testimony of Jesus is worked out through the community of Christ, i.e. his action in history which is his testimony to the truth and to the Father, is worked out through his people—they are him in action (Rev. 1:2, 9; 4:9; 12:11, 17; 19:10; 20:4).

<sup>3</sup> A reading of history in which Christ is the meaning of it, requires us to see that the O.T. is primarily speaking of Christ, but then Christ as fulfilling the plan of God. The N.T. leaves us in no doubt that this is the case, and that the fulfilment comes through the person and work of Christ. Recommended reading is a salvation history account, *Salvation History* (G. Bingham, NCPI, n.d.), *Christ the Conquering King!* (G. Bingham, NCPI, 1985), and *Christ's People in Today's World* (G. Bingham, NCPI, 1985).

### A Question of Debate

It may well be that no chapter has been as much discussed—and debated—as the 20th chapter of the Book of the Revelation.<sup>4</sup> In particular the debate relates to the thousand years mentioned here. This period is not stated elsewhere in Scripture, even though some think it is referred to in one way or another. The interpretative systems of prophecy called ‘premillennial’, ‘postmillennial’ and ‘amillennial’<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> It has been pointed out many times that the millennium—far from bringing joy to the readers of the Book of the Revelation, and far from bringing the very peace it espouses—has been made the basis for much debate, bitter recrimination and much division. It seems obvious that the various views must start from wrong presuppositions or deficient exegesis. Probably most of it is not insincere but it would seem the answer does not lie either in one system or the synthesis—if that is possible—of all the systems. Eirenic discussion on the four main views on the millennium as set out in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* by G. E. Ladd, H. A. Hoyt, L. Boettner and A. H. Hoekema (IVP, 1977) is a good illustration of the difficulty of integrating the various views.

<sup>5</sup> Readers are recommended to do an exhaustive study of the millennial positions in biblical and theological dictionaries and other available sources. Very briefly, we describe the *premillennial* position as claiming that Christ will come and bind Satan and set up a millennial reign on earth. Two of its main forms are (i) *dispensationalism* which relates the events of the Book of the Revelation to Israel and its restoration, and (ii) *a system* which relates the events of the Book of the Revelation to the church and its actions. The position of *amillennialism* is that there is no millennium or rather that the age from the Ascension to the Parousia is the millennium, but that this is by no means ideal. Some amillennialists say there is a millennium but it is in heaven and only the martyrs reign. The system of *postmillennialism* is that Christ will not return until the Kingdom of God has been established by the church in human history. Thus the millennium is the golden age of history, after which Christ will return to inaugurate the ‘end things’. The position taken in this paper is that the age from the Ascension to the

have been devised to cover the meaning of this 20th chapter. In order to enter into the debate—if that is necessary—we need not only to know these systems, but why they have been brought into being. Premillennialists see Christ’s return to earth as prior to the millennium, postmillennialists see it happening after the millennium and amillennialists see the period between Christ’s ascension and his return as being the millennium. In that sense all are millennialists. There are variations of each of these three views, so that millennialism becomes quite complicated.

The view taken in these studies is not that of the above three systems, but it is close to the amillennial system in that it views the period from Christ’s ascension to his return as the millennium, but differs from the classic

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Parousia is the millennium, is the Kingdom of Christ in action, and will consummate when Christ returns, but ‘the little while’ of Satan does not follow it, but is rather within the actions of that system. We must note that there are many variations on these four positions. That is why each ought to be studied. The first three all put the millennium in the future, but the fourth covers the entire church age. Strictly speaking these four systems agree that there is a millennium, although they differ concerning the nature of it. The systems which are not amillennial all see the millennium as wholly rooted into this world and its history. Premillennialism is futuristic and tends to see the church in this age as sadly limited by the events that happen. Postmillennialism has great hope for this present age—that the gospel will succeed in winning the nations. Amillennialism has a practical understanding of the events of this present era and seeks to preach the gospel for the elect. In the fourth system the amillennial strength is present, but it exceeds every other system in that it insists on the present, continuing and climactic victory of Christ prior to—as at—his coming.

amillennial position in that it insists the events of Revelation 20:7–10 are contained *within* the millennium and do not happen *after* it. This is because the millennium is viewed not as a time situation so much as a power situation. This view seems to be contradicted by the text itself, i.e. verse 7—‘*When* the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison [etc.]’ Linked with verse 3b—‘*After that* [the thousand years] he must be loosed for a little while’, it would appear that the event of the loosing of Satan must surely follow the millennium, and this is what all three classical positions—mentioned above—claim to be the case. If, however, it can be shown that ‘the little while’ (cf. Rev. 12:12) is *within* the millennial session, and does not follow it, but is concurrent with it, and that by comparison with one thousand ‘a little while’ is but a small power against a fuller or total power, then the situation would change vastly.

### **The Present Victory and Reigning of Christ**

We must see that Christ is reigning at this present time. I Corinthians 15:24–28 speaks of that present reigning and should be seen in its fullness—‘Christ has had all things put in subjection under his feet’, and this is undoubtedly with relation to both Psalm 2 and Psalm 8. In Psalm 2 the Son is given the nations for his inheritance when he is declared the Son.<sup>6</sup> So the

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<sup>6</sup> We ought to keep in mind the statement to the serpent in Eden that the seed of woman would crush his head (Gen. 3:15), and the statement of Gen. 49:10 that the nations would come to *shiloh*, i.e. to Messiah, and be obedient to him—a contrast to the rebellion of the nations as seen in Ps. 2. This psalm in fact tells us the nations will be forced to become obedient (cf. I Cor. 15:24–

kings of the earth and the nations of the earth who rebelled against the Lord and His anointed now have to kiss the feet of the Son. This is because 'he has been designated Son of God in power' (Rom. 1:4; Ps. 2:7; cf. Matt. 3:17; 17:5) and as Son of Man (Ps. 8:4–8; Heb. 2:6ff.) all things belong under his feet. So in I Corinthians 15:24–27 'he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet'. It is he who is 'destroying every rule and every authority and power'. His reign, then, purposes (i) to destroy enemies, and (ii) to give the Kingdom he has won to the Father, that God might be all in all.

The Resurrection and the Ascension were the means by which the man Jesus came to be declared 'both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36; 3:15; 5:31; cf. John 16:11). Ephesians 1:20f. speaks of the great power of God 'which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come, and he has put all things under his feet . . .' Psalm 2 is again the reference—if not Psalm 8 also—which shows his present reigning over the powers which in I Corinthians 15:24–28 Paul says Christ is destroying, i.e. bringing to be of no account.

Linked with these references to Psalm 2 and the overcoming Son is Revelation 2:26–27 in which Christ says,

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28; Phil. 2:11). See also my *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989).

'... I myself have received power,' i.e. over the nations which he 'rules with a rod of iron'—a reference to Psalm 2:9. In Revelation 3:21 he invites conquerors to share his throne—'I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.' In this latter statement, reference to Psalm 110:1 and Psalm 2:6f. is given. The throne on which Christ is seated is the throne of the Kingdom. Paul speaks of 'the kingdom of Christ and of God' (Eph. 5:5) and Revelation 11:15 speaks of 'the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ'. By Resurrection and Ascension—as we have seen—Christ is presently reigning in heaven.

This reigning is in accordance with Psalm 110:1—'The Lord says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool."' There are at least 16 direct quotes of this verse in the New Testament, and many more indirect quotes of it. Some are made by Jesus in the Gospels, and others are in the Acts, the Epistles and the Revelation. They point to Jesus the Messiah as sharing the throne of God, i.e. sharing God's reigning over all creation not only in this present age but the age to come. Believers are to believe in his present reigning. Ultimately 'every knee [should] shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father' (Phil. 2:10, 11).

In the Book of the Revelation Jesus is depicted as the present 'ruler of the kings on earth' (1:5; cf. 17:14; 19:19), as 'the first and the last' (1:17; 2:8), i.e. 'the Alpha and Omega' (22:13), as 'the Son of God' (2:18), and as 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (17:14; 19:16). In 5:8–14 the same honours are accorded to him as are



given to the Creator in 4:7–11. Christ's name and person are linked with that of God in 7:9–10. The throne in heaven is that of 'God and the Lamb'. The Lamb is Lord of history because he alone can open the seals of the seven-sealed book. His opening of them is really his opening of history. Often in the chapters following there are repetitive revelations of the present reigning of God and the Lamb such as in 11:15f., 12:10 and 15:3f. These flashes of revelation seem to have the purpose of showing that it is not in the ultimate that God will be shown to reign, but it is very much so in the present that He reigns.<sup>7</sup>

***Christ Who is Presently Putting Down All Evil  
Forces Has Already Defeated Them***

The New Testament makes it clear that Christ's victory is complete. His proleptic statement in John 12:31—'Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out'—speaks of an immediate defeat of Satan. In John 14:30–31 he gives some indication of this, '... the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.' The Father commands him to go to the Cross (cf. John 10:17, 18) where Satan will have power, but it will be in that

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<sup>7</sup> If we recognize the fact that the Book of the Revelation was not simply a coded message for the elect, but was an apocalyptic communication to be understood in the present, then we will realize that it was intended to encourage its readers who were already under persecution. That is why the victory of God was repeated from time to time within the seven cycles of the Book. What will be already is, is a theme of the Scriptures, epitomized in Rom. 8:30.

Cross that he will be defeated.<sup>8</sup> In Luke 22:53 Jesus acknowledges that the hour of the Cross is the hour of the power of darkness. Even so, it is Christ's hour, for by taking the guilt of man on himself he destroys the power of the enemy. Two references (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:13–15) make this clear:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public show of them, triumphing over them in him.

So then, Christ by his death, resurrection and ascension 'led a host of captives' (Eph. 4:8), i.e. 'led captivity

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<sup>8</sup> It should be seen from Jude 9 that the Devil has power where there is guilt of sin, i.e. Moses' corpse—the Devil argues—is his because Moses was a sinner. The Devil is seen in Job chs 1 and 2 to be the Accuser. This is so in Rev. 12:10. On the Cross Jesus bore the sins of all humanity and so was under the accusation of the Adversary, Satan. This pain of accusation is part of the excruciating guilt that sinners know, especially of existential guilt for failing to achieve the fullness of their humanity. Christ defeated Satan on the Cross by bearing the totality of the guilt of the human race, thus robbing Satan of authentic accusation. Doubtless the shield of faith (Eph 6:16) alone can 'quench the flaming darts of the evil one' because the darts are the accusations, but the faith of the believer is in the finished work of Christ. No accusation from Satan can be painful since it is now an empty one.



captive' (Ps. 68:18), so that the powers of darkness were then—as also now—his prisoners, defeated by his work on the Cross in his bearing the guilt of humanity. In the first quote (above) those under the power of Satan through the fear of death are obviously delivered from him by the death of the Cross, i.e. Christ's penal atonement which delivers from the fear of punishment (cf. I John 4:16–18) via the love of the Cross. Satan is thus destroyed. Destroyed (*katargeo*)<sup>9</sup> does not mean abolished or obliterated, but made ineffective. Likewise 'disarming' and 'making a public show' refers to the defeat and making ineffective of the principalities and powers. It refers to the custom of parading the defeated enemies in a humiliating show before the victor nation, sometimes in the city-centre or the stadium. In such cases the decisive defeat of the enemy cannot be in doubt.

Such a defeat of Satan Christ prophesied in Matthew 12:29 (cf. Luke 11:21–22) saying that he, as the stronger-than-the-strong man, would bind the strong man, i.e. Satan, and he would take the spoils from him.<sup>10</sup> Doubtless at the Cross Christ despoiled

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<sup>9</sup> This verb is used with various meanings such as 'to destroy' (Rom. 6:6; I Cor. 6:13; Heb. 2:14; II Thess. 2:8; II Tim. 1:10), 'to fade or fade away' (II Cor. 3:7, 11, 13), 'to annul, remove or make void' (Gal. 3:17; 5:4, 11)—and so on. It is also used with the ideas of to paralyse, to put out of employment, to pass away. Thus to destroy the Devil does not mean to obliterate or annihilate, but to put out of effective action, something which approximates to his being chained in the abyss for a thousand years—the time in which he is made ineffective in deceiving the nations.

<sup>10</sup> If Jesus refers to Satan in John 10:10a as the one who steals, then Satan has spoiled Man in the Fall, and has 'the spoils' of war from that defeat of Man. Now Christ re-takes the spoils. These are spoken of in Isa. 53:12, and there is a possible reference to them in Eph. 4:8 for Ps. 68:18 (from which the quote is taken), speaks of Christ *receiving* gifts, rather than *giving*

Satan and his powers, and these forces are now tethered, i.e. they can go no further than they are permitted to, seeing they have been defeated. In Luke 10:18 Jesus spoke of seeing Satan 'fall like lightning from heaven'—a picture paralleled in Revelation 12:9 where Satan is cast down out of heaven, and this event is linked in principle with Isaiah 14:12–15 where the king of Babylon—a type of Satan—falls from heaven, and is brought down into the abyss.

All these references show Christ has already defeated Satan and his forces, and has indeed tethered them, i.e. has set the distances to which they can go under the allowance of God.<sup>11</sup> II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 show that the rebellious angels were cast into Tartarus and are in 'eternal chains until the judgement of the great day'. It is these fallen angels which still work their evil deeds even now, but like Satan they have been 'destroyed' (Col. 2:14–15), but are permitted to do those things God chooses to use as part of His plan. In the situation of the thousand years they and Satan are not permitted to deceive the nations. It would appear that although they are restricted in their operations, yet there is another sense in which they are permitted to work out *all they set out to do* so that (i) it cannot be said that had they been given their full opportunity then they could have succeeded in some

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them, though doubtless he shared them with his victorious army.

<sup>11</sup> This is seen in Rev. 13:7 where the beast is *allowed* to make war on the saints—a thought which derives from Daniel 7:21, 22, 25–27, where the beast prevails over the saints but is ultimately defeated and the saints are victorious.

plan that might have outclassed God, and (ii) God always judges when iniquity ripens to its fullest (cf. Gen. 15:12–16). They are permitted to deceive Gog and Magog but the judgement falls on them when they oppose God (Rev. 20:7–9; cf. 16:14, 16; 17:12–14; 19:11–21; 20:10; 21:8).

What has happened so definitively at the Cross and Resurrection to defeat evil is all that needs to happen to destroy evil powers and evil mankind, so that the time between the Cross—likened to ‘D-Day’—and the Parousia—likened to ‘V-Day’—has often been called the ‘mopping-up’ operations. It is more than that, however, because the principles of judgement, retribution, the participation of the church in history and numerous other things, are involved. The main point for our thinking is that all evil has been irreversibly defeated. Its place is the abyss and it is tethered.

### ***Christ’s Power Total in This Age***

What we conclude from the section above is that Christ’s power is total in this age. His authority (*exousia*) is total—‘All authority is . . . given unto me’ (Matt. 28:18)—and the period of exercise of that power is ‘unto the consummation of the age’, and this is the time when Christ is present to the world and to his church. Ephesians 1:19–22 speaks of him being given authority over all things—in heaven, on earth, and under the earth—so that he is head over all things, and this is—among other things—*for the church*. In this context the church is given his fullness—the fullness that is working itself out in and for the plan of God, as the Epistle so clearly

shows. To say that he does not reign in this age is to contradict all that we have said above. To show him as detached and as operating only in heaven—above the action but not present to it and in it—is to contradict the facts, since he said, ‘Behold, I am with you, even to the end [i.e. the consummation] of the age’ (Matt. 28:20b).<sup>12</sup> In this he has *tes sunteleias tou ainonos*—‘the completion of the age’—in mind. This means that all his exercise of authority is teleological. Paul gives the parallel to this in I Corinthians 15:24–28 where the triumph of the Kingdom is in mind.

### ***Christ Present in This Age***

Whilst the Ascension spelled a separation from the disciples—and so from the church—which was a separation to sight, the separation was not a separation to faith. Since Christ had said he would be with the apostles, then he was! They attributed the healing of the crippled man at the Gate Beautiful to Christ. Throughout Acts signs and wonders are attributed to Christ as Lord (cf. 4:30; 14:3),<sup>13</sup> thus showing he was present. He appeared to Paul, and this more than once (Acts 22:17). In Acts 26:16 Jesus tells Paul that he is to witness ‘to the things in

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<sup>12</sup> What we should see here is that Christ not only remains with them *until* the consummation of the age, but he remains for the purpose of consummating the age, i.e. he remains *for* the consummation of the age. This is because his people cannot—of themselves—consummate the age.

<sup>13</sup> In Acts 2:22–23 the signs are from God, but then they are through Christ, and doubtless this is the case in Acts 19:11. See Rom. 15:18–19.

which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you.’ This means Jesus showed himself to Paul on a number of occasions. In II Timothy 4:16–17 Paul spoke of all deserting him but ‘the Lord *stood by me* and gave me strength to proclaim the message fully.’

We will see now that for the Spirit to be present with believers was—and is—for Christ to be present. Christ was present to them, and is still present to his people *by the Spirit*.

### ***Christ Always Present in Today’s World Through the Spirit***

In Acts 1:1 Luke talks of ‘all that Jesus *began* to do and teach,’ this being what he has described in his Gospel. He is inferring that Acts will be an account of what Jesus was *going on* doing and teaching, to which we might add that church history describes what he has been going on doing and teaching to the present moment. This, as against the idea that the Ascension meant—and means—‘the real absence of Christ’ in history until his Parousia. We have seen above that Jesus was—and is—present with and in his church, and in the actions of history.

Until his ascension Jesus was ‘the Man of the Spirit’, but when seated at the right hand of the Father he became ‘the Man sending and directing the Spirit’.<sup>14</sup> The Spirit became ‘the Spirit of the Man’. Thus the Spirit is variously called ‘the Spirit of Christ’, ‘the Spirit of the Lord’, ‘the Spirit of the Son’ and ‘the Spirit of Jesus’. In this

way he is closely identified with Christ who once called him ‘another Counsellor’ (John 14:16) so that the Spirit has been called Jesus’ *alter ego*. Certainly in II Corinthians 3:17–18 the Spirit and Christ seem to be almost the one, and so much so, that most exegetes find difficulty in distinguishing them. A passage such as Acts 16:6–10 speaks of the guidance given to the apostolic band as being by ‘the Holy Spirit’ and ‘the Spirit of Jesus’. Again, in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 Christ writes his seven letters to the churches in Asia, but their contents are described as ‘what the Spirit is saying to the churches’. The Spirit is not to speak ‘from himself’, i.e. ‘on his own authority’ but is to glorify both the Son and the Father. In Romans 8:9–11 Christ and the Spirit both indwell the believer, and in Ephesians 3:16 Christ is said to indwell the believer through the Spirit. In I John 3:24 we are told that we know through the Spirit that Christ dwells in us. Thus all the sayings about believers dwelling in Christ and Christ in them—which we have mentioned above—tell us that where the Spirit is, there is Christ, and where Christ is, there is the Spirit.

What, then, do we make of the sayings regarding the Parousia—the appearing of Christ, often called ‘the second coming’ and ‘the return of Christ’? Apart from what may be a deficient understanding and use of the terms, we are assured Christ and the Father both dwell in us (John 14:23; cf. I John 4:16), and that Jesus is Immanuel—‘God with us’. We also are to know that we ‘walk by faith and not by sight’ (II Cor. 5:7), so that whilst Christ is not present to sight he is certainly present *to* faith, though not *by* faith, i.e. our faith does not make him present but simply apprehends his presence.

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<sup>14</sup> This can be seen in John 16:7 and Acts 2:33.

We are bound to conclude, then, that Christ is wholly present in this age of ‘the last days’. The Spirit is present in these last days (Acts 2:17–21) and is indeed the eschatological Spirit in relation to these days (cf. Isa. 11:1–3, 4; cf. II Thess. 2:8). What has often been missed is the enormous significance of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit, for this was the beginning of a new era—the outworking of ‘I will draw all men unto me’ (John 12:32). This was to follow ‘the casting out of the ruler of this world’ (John 12:31) since the Devil was not to be allowed to deceive the nations (Rev. 20:3) during the time of the millennium, and so the nations were to be drawn to Christ and ultimately to be brought into the holy city (Rev. 7:9–14; 21:24–22:2).

### **The Present Reigning of Believers**

One might question whether believers reign in life, now, in face of the powers of evil. That they do is clearly seen in Paul’s statement of Romans 5:17:

If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man [Adam], much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Some commentators see this reigning as wholly eschatological<sup>15</sup> and doubtless it is that, but it is not only

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<sup>15</sup> When we ask ‘What does “wholly eschatological” mean?’, any answer must contain the two notions, (i) that what is eschatological belongs to the *eschaton* or the last era, and (ii) that in one sense all history is the last era, so that all prophecy is linked in time with what we call ‘the continuing present’. In some sense, then, what is eschatological is in the *now* as well as the *then*. What is proleptic is as what will be, and this is illustrated by Rom. 8:30 where we are now both justified and glorified. In Gal.

that. The whole passage of Romans 5:12–21 speaks of something which happens now. The believer, then, reigns *now*—‘in life’—and does it through the one man Jesus Christ. This is much the same as Ephesians 2:4–7 in which it is said that God raised us from the dead—now—and ‘made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus’. In both these instances we share the reigning with Christ—the promise that Christ gives to those who conquer—as set out in Revelation 2:26–27 and 3:21. No person is a conqueror by his or her own efforts or power, but every believer is a conqueror in Christ. John said, ‘Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world,’ and he also wrote, ‘I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one’ (I John 4:4; 2:13–14).

In Romans 8:35–39 Paul speaks of the things which seek to separate believers from the love of Christ, and states that it is impossible for them to do so even though ‘For thy sake we are being killed all the day long,’ and ‘we are regarded as sheep for the slaughter.’ He says emphatically, ‘No, *in all these things* we are more than

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5:5 Paul gives an eschatological note to justification which is mostly spoken of as *now* in the Pauline Epistles. C. H. Dodd’s ‘realized eschatology’ is an extension of these ideas: for him nothing will happen in the future which is not wholly so now, so that nothing can be said to be of the future. Adrio König, *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology* (Eerdmans, 1989) says that Christ himself is the *eschatos*, hence all eschatology is in him and from him. This helps us to understand the time factor more intelligently.

conquerors through him who loved us.’ Notice the *in all these things*. It is not *in spite of them* or even *over them*, but *in them* that we are conquerors. That is, the opposition may seem to be strong and powerful but it is no match for us—in *Christ*. Hence Paul says in Philippians 4:13, ‘I can do all things *in him* who strengthens me.’

We see the enemies which the believer overcomes in Christ—namely sin, the world, the flesh, Satan, the principalities and powers, the judgement of the law and the fear of death. In one way of speaking these are monstrous enemies: in another way, these enemies are weak in the face of the believer’s union with Christ and his atonement. The Devil makes a great noise—going about as a roaring lion—but when the believer humbles himself under the almighty hand of God and resists the Devil, then the Devil will turn tail and flee from him (James 4:7; I Pet. 5:6–9; cf. I John 2:12–14), i.e. ‘one little word shall fell him’. Paul says we have been crucified to the world as also the world has been crucified to us (Gal. 1:4; 6:14), and John says, ‘This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith’ (I John 5:4). Revelation 12:11 says that the saints of God have overcome the dragon ‘by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony’ and that they are not afraid of death. In Revelation 15:2 John speaks of those ‘who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name’, showing that believers do not have to give in to the beast, however much others may marvel at it and say in wonderment, ‘Who is like the beast and who can fight against it?’

## **An Interpretation of Revelation 20:1–10**

### **Verses 1–3**

The foregoing materials have been presented to help us in our interpretation of the passage. We need also to realize that the Book of the Revelation and its actions are not necessarily in chronological order. In 19:11, 17; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1, 22 John says ‘then I saw’ (6 times) and ‘and I saw’ (once). The ‘then’ does not necessarily place these events John saw in sequence. It is his *seeing* which is in sequence and not necessarily the events. When it comes to the matter of the thousand years we do not necessarily have to think of it as *literal*—since an abyss, and a key to it can scarcely be *literal*, even if they are *actual*—so that it does not even have to be a *time* matter.<sup>16</sup> Thomas Torrance in his *The Apocalypse Today* (James Clarke, 1960, pp. 162–164) says in this regard:

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<sup>16</sup> It should be kept in mind that the matter of time in the Revelation does not equal our idea of time. For example, when it is said of God ‘who was and is and is to come’, it is not speaking of Him having ‘been, being, and yet shall be’, for such a concept of God is foolish. He is not in time, and does not pass the time, and there is no future for Him to look into. Whilst ‘who was and is and is to come’ certainly appears to us as a time sequence—seeing we are creatures of time, and God speaks to us as creatures of time—yet the emphasis here is the *action* that God does in what to us is past, present and future. God is always being, i.e. being Himself, no matter what time we may view Him to be in. The statement ‘who was and is and is to come’ means ‘who was acting, who is acting, and who will always be acting, i.e. doing’. This can be seen in Rev. 17:8 where the beast ‘was’, i.e. was acting, but now is not (acting) but yet will be (acting).



The visions of this chapter, which are among the most difficult in the book, have to do with the prelude to eternity which is mysteriously bound up with a thousand years. We must remind ourselves again that these are apocalyptic visions and not history. We have glimpses of an unseen world, and of its bearing upon world events here and now. We are given also intimations of what shall be. But all this is clothed in mysterious symbolical language and measured out in its span by an apocalyptic calendar. It is expressed thus precisely because it cannot be expressed in the straightforward way of direct speech. Extraordinary symbols have been thrown upon the screen of vision, strange uncanny creatures in a fantastic mixture of the mythical and the recognizable, and now on the same screen of vision we have the symbol of a thousand years. It is quite evident that we have no more right to take this thousand years literally than we have to take the ten-headed and seven-horned monster literally. It is entirely out of place therefore to bring down the thousand years out of its apocalyptic setting and place it on the ordinary plane of history, as if it could be handled by a worldly arithmetic and manipulated in calculations about the dispensations of time or about the end of the world. Such an intrusion into the secrets of God is utterly foreign to the Bible, and, as we have seen again and again in this book, it is always denied to us. God's time is different from our time.

What kind of time is it in the Kingdom of God? It is time like a thousand years, perfect in duration and complete in itself, time in which the dragon of guilt is bound, time therefore which can mature and find its perfect fulfilment in the eternal life of God—the time of Christ, the Alpha and the Omega.

Now 'was, and is, and is to come' does not refer to God being in time—since He could not, but it does refer to Him *acting* in what we call time (was, is, to come). Therefore we should not look at the time statement as a time concept but rather as a power-in-action concept. God has always been, is being and will always be, powerful in

action. Hence 'a thousand years' here compares with 'a little while'—*mikron chronon*—(20:3; cf. 20:7; 12:12), 'his time is short' (*oligon kairon*). In principle, then, the situation of reigning is a complete and perfect one of power and action whilst 'a little while' is a minor action by comparison. It is not full, complete and effective, but partial, momentary and ineffective. In respect to this, Torrance says of the thousand years (p. 165):

This is the apocalyptic account of what goes on behind history, the story from the angle of the Kingdom of God, of its breaking into the midst of our sinful world, and its reign in the midst of our time. No doubt we may here recall the words of Jesus in the parable. 'No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man. And then he will spoil his house' (Matt. 12:29). That is precisely what happened when the Kingdom of God invaded our world in the person of Jesus Christ, for through Him the Kingdom of God is here amongst us even now. Already the end-time has come upon us. The time of Alpha is also the time of Omega. Already the Kingdom-of-God-time runs throughout our time, and presses to its manifestation in the Advent of Christ. Behind the course of sinful history the reign of Christ is actually taking place.

All of this seems clear enough—the 'thousand years' is a power concept on a major scale, and the 'little while' is a power concept on a minor scale. What, then, do we make of 'after this he must be loosed for a little while' (v. 3) and 'And when the thousand years are ended' (v. 7)? There will be no explanation if we try to resolve a time sequence. If we see them as power concepts then there will not be a sequence in their operations. There will simply be a conflict of the two 'systems' or 'situations', i.e. the 'thousand years' will prevail over the 'little while'. The power of the thousand years does not alter or

terminate when Satan in his 'little while' gathers Gog and Magog and seeks to destroy 'the camp of the saints'. Satan does not do this 'after' the thousand years—since there can be no 'after' in a power situation. To say that the 'thousand years' and the 'little while' run concurrently is to go back into a time sequence and so to abandon the power-action concepts.

### ***Verses 4-6***

We need to note that John does not tell us where this reign takes place. Commentators argue as to whether it was in heaven or on earth that the thousand years' happening took place. He said, 'I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgement was committed.' What were these thrones? In Daniel 7:9 it is simply said that the thrones were placed, but in 7:22 it is said that 'judgement was given *for* the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom'. This is amplified in 7:26-27 when it is said that 'the court shall sit in judgement, and his [the beast's] dominion shall be taken away to be consumed and destroyed to the end. And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them'.

If we transfer the passage of Daniel 7:1-27 and use it as in interpretative key, then we would need to apply it first to Revelation chapters 13:1-17; 14:9-13; 15:3; 19:11-21, as these passages show us the dragon, the beast and the second beast (or false prophet) in

their power and then as defeated, which then opens up the way for the saints to reign over the Kingdom. Since the saints are linked with 'one like a son of man' in Daniel 7 who is given sovereignty over all the nations, it would seem this principle is wholly applicable to Revelation 20:4-6:

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgement was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.

If we ask in regard to verse 4, 'To whom is judgement committed?', we have an indication in Luke 12:32 and 22:28-30:

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

In the first reference Jesus tells his disciples 'it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'—obviously a reference to Daniel 7—whilst in the second reference they are told they will 'sit on thrones judging



the twelve tribes of Israel'. It may well be that in Daniel 7 the saints sit on the thrones of verse 9:

As I looked,  
 thrones were placed  
 and one that was ancient of days took his seat;  
 his raiment was white as snow,  
 and the hair of his head like pure wool;  
 his throne was fiery flames,  
 its wheels were burning fire;

but in verse 26 it simply says the court sat in judgement:

But the court shall sit in judgement,  
 and his dominion shall be taken away,  
 to be consumed and destroyed to the end.

It has been thought the thrones are those of the 24 elders (Rev. 4:4) and whilst the elders do sit in judgement it does not seem clear that the thrones here are those of the elders. We note that those on the thrones are not said to reign, even though, perhaps, it may be inferred. What is said clearly is that the martyrs (cf. Rev. 6:9–14)—those beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and the word of God—reign with Christ, having come to life. It neither says they were on the thrones nor not on thrones. (Note that the 'also' of Rev. 20:4 gives us two sets of beings or persons—those on the thrones *and* the martyrs.)

Much depends on what is meant by 'came to life' and 'this is the first resurrection'. It can easily be argued that all believers have 'come to life' by participating in 'the first resurrection', i.e. that described in Romans 6:1–10; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:5; and Colossians 3:1–2. It can also be argued that there is no 'second resurrection'

as it is not mentioned in Revelation. It could be argued that there is a second resurrection—the resurrection of the body—and these both—the first and the second resurrection—seem to be contained in Romans 6:1–10. It can also be argued from John 11:25 that believers never die:

Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.'

So that in John 5:29 there is a conflation of John 11:25 and the statement of John 5:29:

and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgement.

If this is linked with John 5:24 then the picture is complete. Certainly all believers will never meet 'the second death', i.e. being cast into the lake of fire (cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:14–15; 21:8).

We can now come to some conclusion, even if we may not be dogmatic about it. It is this: the thousand years is that situation which is the Kingdom of God, over which Christ reigns, and judgement is committed to certain of his elect. The martyrs also reign with him. It could be that certain of his elect reign as on earth and the martyrs as in heaven. This is not inconceivable in the light of Hebrews 12:22–24:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new

covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel,

where all the elect in heaven—all who are ‘enrolled in heaven’—and on earth, worship together. Certainly the second death cannot touch such, since their names are in the book of life. If all of this is so, then the millennium is now, i.e. it has been since the Ascension and will be until the Parousia.

Before we reject this idea let us remember we have seen that Christ is now present on earth, that he reigns here now, that his saints all reign with him in the Kingdom, that Satan and his powers are bound now, and that Daniel 7 is being fulfilled in the operations of the beast (in Revelation the dragon, the beast and the second beast), the defeat of the beast, the defeat of the false prophet and of the Devil. In Ezekiel chapters 38–39 the matter of Gog and Magog is taken up. God tells Gog that He will bring judgement against him, his land (Magog) and his people. He will bring them against Israel in great hordes but they will be destroyed and be given over to birds of prey (cf. Rev. 19:17–18), and ‘I will send fire on Magog [cf. Rev. 20:7] and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands; and they shall know that I am the Lord’.

### ***Problems Regarding the Placing of the Millennium in History***

One of the problems in interpretations of chiliasm—those who view the thousand years as a period<sup>17</sup> and not a power situation—is that they see

<sup>17</sup> We are not saying that the millennium does not constitute a period, but if that is the only way it is viewed, then the understanding of it is lost. Even if it is viewed as an ideal period its value is still not seen. We may say—with the amillennialists—that it is the period from the Ascension to the Parousia, but the

the millennium as in the future (postmillennial and premillennial views). When the millennium is seen as *now*, and the work of the Devil being a pitting of Satan against Christ who is ruling the Kingdom, and his people who are in ‘the camp of the saints’, then this event is pushed even further than the millennium into the far future.

A second problem is fitting the millennium into the teaching of the whole Bible. There can be no question that there will be an age of peace and this principle is found in the Old Testament<sup>18</sup>—such as in Isaiah 2:1–4; Micah 4:1–3; Isaiah 9:5–7; 11:6–10—and many references to the establishment of the Kingdom of God tend to point that way. However, no such block of teaching is given of an idyllic epoch which will happen when Satan and evil powers will be tethered, and the saints shall reign. Without doubt Daniel 7 fits the picture in Revelation regarding the beast, the beast’s defeat and the reigning over the nations and judgement by the saints, but no time

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amillennialists see the events of Rev. 20:7–10 happening after the millennium, so that the event of ‘the little while’ is not seen as as happening now but after the millennium, so that it is in the future.

<sup>18</sup> This seems to give great encouragement to the post-millennialists. They believe Christ will draw all men unto himself (John 12:32), that the nations will be disciples and baptized into Christ (Matt. 28:18–20) and the Kingdom of God established on earth by the proclamation of the gospel (cf. Rom. 15:18f.; Rev. 19:15). Even so, it is still a form of chiliasm and makes the thousand years not a power system, but an era followed by Satan inciting Gog and Magog against the church—the holy city.

era is envisaged before the Day of the Lord. It is this which makes some scholars uneasy at the principle of chiliasm.

Another problem facing those who study the Revelation is that of the relevance of the millennium to any age in which its account is read. Adrio König (*The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology*. Eerdmans, pp. 129–130) says:

Broadly speaking, the circumstances under which the revelation was written were these: The young churches of Asia Minor were subjected to persecution and martyrdom (Rev. 2:9–10, 13; 3:10). This made them confused and doubtful, because the gospel as it was taught to them asserted that Satan had been defeated (Col. 2:15; Matt. 12:28–29; Luke 10:17–18; 11:20–22; John 12:31). Why then were they under attack? Had not Christ conquered Satan by his life, death, and resurrection? Neither chiliast nor anti-chiliast takes proper account of the confusion being experienced by the Asian Christians. Revelation 20 is often explained in a way which would have conveyed nothing to its original recipients—as if it were really written to us. John never expected that one or two thousand years would elapse before Christ returned. Jesus himself forbade all calculations of when he would return (Matt. 24:36–50; 25:13; Mark 13:33–37). Further, both Christ and his apostles taught that his return was near (I Cor. 7:29; Jas. 5:8–9; I John 2:18; Rev. 22:12). In I Thess. 4:15 Paul clearly considers it possible that he will be one of those to see the second coming.

Revelation 20 could have offered no consolation whatever to those original readers if the thousand years were meant literally. How could it have helped the confused, persecuted congregations of ancient Asia Minor to learn that Satan would be bound at some remote, future time? They needed help then! This means that futuristic chiliasm is unacceptable.

The way in which we have presented the matter above would have met the needs and understanding of

the early Christians and—for that matter—all Christians in all ages. They could have understood that ‘a little while’ was a minor pressure to living when the thousand strong reign of Christ could so easily overcome it. There was the victory! In all things they could be conquerors. Christ was the one reigning, and not the dragon or the beast. They would see that all believers are sealed so no actual harm can come to them. Suffering may come but its degree was most minor (cf. Rom. 8:18). The church was/is protected in the wilderness (Rev. 12:6, 14). No eternal harm or destruction can come to the church. Even the earth opened up its mouth to receive the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth.

So then—as we have pointed out above—the true millennium in action is from Christ’s Ascension to his Parousia. By comparison the things the Devil was doing to the early church were only for ‘a little while’ in comparison to the millennium of power. Thus the church in every age can live in peace, sure that one cannot be harmed<sup>19</sup> when one is sealed by God for Himself (Rev. 7:1f.), that seal being the Spirit and received in baptism.<sup>20</sup> The relatively small power of the ‘little while’ is nothing against the mighty power of Christ who—with his Father—reigns over all. The early church had in its *corpus* of faith the important passage of I Corinthians 15:24–28 which stated that ‘he [Christ] must<sup>21</sup> reign until

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<sup>19</sup> By ‘harmed’ we do not mean no physical harm will come to believers. Harm may well come but there will not be that kind of harm which will damage the essential being of the faithful person.

<sup>20</sup> As in Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30; cf. II Cor. 1:21–22.

<sup>21</sup> The *dei* here is not simply the ‘must’ of inevitability but of indispensability. This is what has to happen.

he has put all enemies under his feet', and when we ask 'When would that be—that he would be putting down all enemies?'—the answer must be, 'In this last age.' If we see the millennium as this present age then it can contain all that we read of the Revelation from 5:1 through to 20:15, for in that section of the Book is the account of the rise and fall of Satan and his kingdom, and the triumph of Christ, so that his Messianic Kingdom ultimately becomes co-terminal with the Kingdom of God. He then is able to give the whole Kingdom to the Father to the glory of the Father, and that God may be 'all in all'. This being so, the doctrine of the millennium far from being something in the future and absent from present reality, becomes a doctrine of great encouragement as it insists that Satan's power is minimal and that of the Kingdom is maximal. All that happens in this age in regard to persecution and suffering<sup>22</sup> is little against the brilliance of freedom, the victory of being in Christ and the hope of glory. The kingdom of darkness has no future, the world-system is passing away (I John 2:17; cf. I Cor. 7:31) and everything about it is doomed to the lake of fire.

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<sup>22</sup> Suffering is a rich teaching of the N.T. Suffering is not something to which believers simply have to resign themselves, but it is a gift of God (Phil. 1:29), it is intimate fellowship with Christ (Phil. 3:10), it is life lived consistently with his (Col. 1:24), it makes the life of Christ manifest in our mortal bodies (II Cor. 4:11), it is the way *of* and *to* glory (Rom. 8:17–18; II Cor. 4:16), and it is not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed *to* us and *in* us (Rom. 8:18–25).

### **The Personal and Pastoral Value of Millennialism**

According to the system espoused so will be its value. Both premillennialism and postmillennialism have their systems rooted firmly in this world. Each in its own way has given rise to utopianism—the belief that a perfect situation can happen in the time of human history. The futuristic nature of premillennialism and dispensationalism does not give much value to things present, as they are seen to be of no permanent value: indeed they are virtually irrelevant. For some, premillennialism motivates to determined evangelism, but for others it is simply the ingathering of a small remnant. Postmillennialism has a strong constraint to evangelism and the discipling of the nations. Whilst amillennialism is also rooted in history, it sees it as the time in which Christ is working, followed by a final working of evil's defeat, but it primarily looks to his return to consummate all things. Likewise, the fourth millennial position we have presented is rooted in history, but it does not look to anything as happening on the earth after the coming of Christ: he will then consummate history.

When each system is taken on its own it has certain values because of what it teaches. Unfortunately some systems seem to see Christ as absent from the earth in this present time, even though present in heaven. This raises a personal and pastoral problem and tends to pessimism and conspiratorial phobias—sometimes to the point of paranoia. This present age seems to offer little to them—adherents are often primarily futuristic in their thinking seeing little value or hope rising from the present. There

is a tendency to minimize what can be done in evangelism, conversion and holiness of life. Those who see the millennium as being in the *now* of history and know Christ to be reigning *now*, have more confidence in the sovereign action of God, and expect much that is great to happen before the Parousia.

### ***Victory or No Victory?***

The New Testament is redolent with the victory of Christ over all forms of evil—his victory over Satan, the principalities and powers, their world-system and their so-called wisdom. Prior to his incarnation, it would seem they did as they would, even to Satan's temptation of Man so that he fell, his inciting and control of the nations, his manipulation of rebellion in heaven and his attempt to destroy the Christ child<sup>23</sup>—set out in Revelation 12:1–6. Christ's victory over Satan at the time of the temptation in the wilderness, at the time of his ministry (cf. Acts 10:38; Matt. 12:28) and through the Cross and the Resurrection (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15) unhanded Satan as a dominant power. In addition Christ's victory over the flesh (the fallen state of Man), over sin, over the dominating power of judgemental law, and over death, i.e. the *fear* of death, all constitute a wonderful and far-reaching victory.

It is unfortunate that some forms of eschatological

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<sup>23</sup> These things are dealt with more particularly in my book *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989). One side of salvation history is the attempt of Satan and his followers to usurp the throne of God and rule over creation—a ministry given to Man and not even to angelic powers.

teaching seem to show Christ's victory as minor in comparison to the power of Satan and his world-system. Only the return of Christ can topple him, and yet the truth is that he has been toppled. When John said, 'The whole world [lies] in the power of the evil one,' that is taken by some to mean the whole creation lies in Satan's power, which is obviously absurd. Those in his world-system are certainly in his power (cf. Eph. 2:1–3; II Tim. 2:26) but John also said, 'This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.'<sup>24</sup> Sometimes—and perhaps in reaction to their own misunderstood view of Satan's great power—some Christians emphasize the victory of Christ in an almost jingoistic fashion, singing songs of victory, shouting against the power of evil as a form of protest, but yet in their heart of hearts thinking Satan is nevertheless powerful.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> In the same breath that John says the world lies in the power of the evil one he also says that those born of God do not sin and the evil one cannot touch them (I John 5:18–19). Here there is no despairing acknowledgement that Satan is in control—to the contrary, for the world-system is powerless against God and His Messiah.

<sup>25</sup> This has been described as 'whistling in the dark whilst singing in the light'. The misgiving of this kind of Christian does not allow him to believe Satan is bound now, in spite of Christ's statements of Matt. 12:28–29 and John 12:31–32. In some worship situations Christians feel compelled to 'bind Satan' so that they can worship God. The fact is Satan has already been bound and it is Christ who is 'the minister in the sanctuary' (Heb. 8:2), worship is offered through him (I Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:15), and by means of the Spirit of worship (John 4:23–24; Phil. 3:3). The statement in Rev. 12:10, 11 is that the brethren *have already* overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb, not that they *are habitually overcoming* him in this way. They habitually see him as having been overcome. Only then do 'victory songs' become authentic.



The primary question is this, ‘Is our eschatology and our view of the millennium such that in this present age we can proclaim Christ’s present victory over all evil, and to that extent and degree that men and women will know themselves to be liberated from the power of Satan and sin, and believe they can “reign in life by one Christ Jesus?”, or must the statement of that victory always be tempered with a caution of “Ah yes, but the victory is as yet not complete . It is only a provisional victory. Satan still has great power, and sin and the flesh can fell a believer at any time?”’<sup>26</sup>

### **Preaching the Millennium**

This is something the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher is not called upon to do. Each of these—and all together—are called to proclaim Christ and not the millennium. The millennium as an entity is almost hidden. The reason is that it is a situation, an entity of power, an environment in which the people of God live, and in which evil finds itself subdued and defeated. For this reason it is not proclaimed. At the same time the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher who does not understand its nature, who does not see it as the Kingdom of God in reality—if not yet in full consummation—will always be deficient in understanding the victory of God.

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<sup>26</sup> It is true that the defeat of Satan and sin must always be in the context of humility and dependence upon God (cf. James 4:6–7; I Pet. 5:6–9), but then all life should be lived that way. Pride has no place in proper Christian living, yet—pride or no pride—it is an objective fact that Satan has been defeated and bound!

His ministry is likely to be tentative, hesitant, lacking in power and assurance, and thus likely to be like the trumpet which sounds an uncertain note. His listeners, then, will also see the gospel as a tentative one.

For this reason it is incumbent upon proclaimers to live in the fullness of assurance of the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ, and not to be ashamed of it, and not to hedge it round with so much conditioning that hearers will be unsure of it. Whilst we are not called to proclaim the millennium we are called to live in it and to proclaim the Lord who is over it. This will be persuasive in drawing all men unto Him, in bringing the nations to the obedience of faith and submission to Christ, in baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and thus fulfilling the mandate to preach Him throughout the world until those nations come in time to bring their glory into the holy city and worship Him who lives for ever and ever.

### **Christ is Presently and Always King**

Try to imagine yourself without personal knowledge of the gospel, of the Father, the Son and the Spirit and purposive action throughout this present age—then apocalyptic is of immense value. Apocalyptic reveals Christ as King and Lord in history, controlling it with his sovereign powers, and bringing it steadily to its ultimate goal. If you could be without personal knowledge of the millennium then life would be without an object of hope—and a magnificent hope at that. It is good to record that the millennium—rightly understood and

rightly proclaimed—is one of the most pondered, discussed and incentive-raising teachings of the New Testament. It is not speaking of a period of rare respite in the long haul from the point of Christ's ascension to the point of his parousia. No: it is speaking of the mighty victory of Christ over all creatures and powers—so much so, that he is Lord of history and King of kings and Lord of lords, and is ever able to lead his people in victory and his enemies in their defeat.

### A Selected Bibliography

There is a large variety of books published on the millennial systems, and for this reason the bibliography given here is selective. Readers are directed to the bibliography included in *The Meaning of the Millennium* (below).

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