

PROBLEMS WITH POPULAR PREMILLENNIALISM

-A. Ralph Johnson

SECTION ONE – CHRIST RETURN--BEFORE OR AFTER THE MILLENNIUM?

There are a number of scriptures that indicate Jesus will not return to earth until after the Millennium, the thousand year period spoken of in Revelation 20.

I. **Revelation 20 indicates three events follow the thousand years** which other scriptures tell us will come to pass at Christ's coming.

A. **When Jesus comes, the wicked will be raised. The wicked will not be raised until after the millennium is finished** (Rev 20:5, 12, 13).

Rev 1:7. When he “*comes on the clouds,*” “*every eye shall see him*” including “*they that pierced him.*” This indicates that when he comes the wicked who crucified him will be raised.

Mt 26:64. Jesus said to Caiaphas the High Priest, “*Ye shall see the son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.*” (Also Mk 14:62.)

Jn. 5:28-29. “*For the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.*”

This does not indicate 1,000 years separated the events.

Matt. 12:41-42. The men of Nineveh who repented shall “*rise up in the judgment with this* [wicked--cf. verses 38, 39, 43-45] *generation and condemn it.*” Thus both the righteous and the wicked are raised together.

1Jn. 2:28. The unfaithful would be “*ashamed*” at his coming.

Mt. 25:1-12 “*They all slumbered and slept*” (cf. 1Thes 4:14). When Christ comes all those who sleep, faithful and unfaithful, arise together.

OBJECTION: 1Thes. 4:16 says the dead in Christ shall rise “first.” Nothing is said of the wicked being raised at that time.

ANSWER:

This does not say that the dead in Christ will be raised before the wicked. He says they will be raised “*first*” --before the living are caught up. The living will not be caught up before the dead are raised. They will be caught up “*together*” to meet the Lord in the clouds.

The passage does not exclude the wicked. The chapter division was made much later and is of no import. It will be noted that he continues in 5:2 to warn about the “*day of the Lord*” (cf. 2Pet. 3:10, 12) which comes “*as a thief*” (cf. 5:2-9 with Matt. 25:1-13) –indicating that at this time destruction comes upon the wicked.

OBJECTION:

“1Cor 15:23-25 says nothing of the wicked being raised with the righteous.”

ANSWER:

The passage says nothing about the Millennium either. Paul is giving assurance of the resurrection of the righteous to immortality. Hence, he does not deal with the wicked. The lack of mention of the wicked no more proves a different time of resurrection than it does that they will not be raised at all. Actually the text indicates the coming of Christ will be after the thousand years, for it says of the time of his coming, “*then cometh the end.*” The end of the earth comes after the thousand years (Rev. 20:11). Furthermore, he reigns until death is put under his feet. That is when the resurrection takes place (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). The thousand years precedes this.

OBJECTION: “Rev 20:5-6 speaks of two resurrections, one at the beginning and another at the end of the thousand years. When the righteous are raised, Jesus will be coming on the clouds.”

ANSWER:

This does not say this resurrection is literal. The book of Revelation is written in symbolic language. It may be that this “resurrection” is symbolic.

The passage speaks of “souls,” not bodies, and it does not say whether they were in heaven or on earth. It would be perfectly consistent with the nature of the book if it symbolized the triumph of the spirit of the martyrs which in Rev 6:9-11 are pictured crying out under the altar.

Again, Rom 11:15 pictures the conversion of the Jews as a resurrection from the dead. Thus, a great conversion of people to Christ would appropriately be pictured as a resurrection.

Baptism is also represented as the resurrection which begins our spiritual life (Rom 6:4, 5; Col 2:12, 13; 3:1).

Victorinus, [300 AD] bishop of Petau, in his commentary on Revelation, (20:4-5) gave a similar explanation:

There are two resurrections. But the first resurrection is now of the souls that are by the faith, which does not pass over to the second death. Of this resurrection the apostle says: “If ye have risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.”¹

B. When Christ comes and sits on his throne (Mat 25:31-46) the earth will pass away.

This occurs **after** the thousand years (**Rev 20:11**).

1. 2Pet 3:3-13. The “*Day of the Lord*” or “*Day of God*” is to come without warning like the flood.

When they are saying, “***Where is the promise of his coming?*** for, since the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.” destruction shall suddenly come upon them (2Pet 3:4). It is not reasonable that this would be while Jesus has been sitting on a literal earthly throne for a thousand years, ruling all nations with a rod of iron.

¹ Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7, p.359

When Jesus comes, it will be like the conditions that prevailed just before the flood. They were then overwhelmed with water. Next time it will be with fire. In verse 10 he says the “*day of the Lord*” will come “*like a thief*” and “*the heavens shall pass away with a great noise.*” Verse 13 says there will be a “*New heavens and a new earth.*” Compare these statements with other passages such as 1Thes. 5:2; Matt. 24:37-38, 42-43. This clearly takes place after the thousand years (Rev. 20:11)

OBJECTION:

The text tells us that the “*Day of the Lord*” is 1,000 years long. (2Pet. 3:8)

ANSWER:

It does not say it is 1,000 years long. It says, “*One day is as a thousand years.*” It also says that 1,000 years is “*as*” one day. This is simply teaching that God is not bound by time in doing His work.

Ps. 90:4 *For a thousand years in thy sight are but **as yesterday** when it is past, and **as a watch in the night.***

God can do in one day what men think would take a thousand years. Or, He might take a thousand years to accomplish what men expect would be done in one day. By “*day*” he is speaking of the time in which men would be saying, “*Where is the promise of His coming?*”

1Thes. 5:2 tells us that when they are saying, “*Peace and safety,*” then “*sudden*” *deruction.*” According to Rev. 20:7-11, this appears to be after the thousand years.

2. Matt. 24:35-44; Luke 17:23-37.

“*Heaven and earth shall pass away...*” “*...as in the days before the flood...*” They will not know “*in what watch the thief comes.*” It would be, “*as it came to pass in the days of Lot. The same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.*” (cf. Rev. 20:9-11) “*Even thus shall it be in the day when the son of man is revealed.*” Compare this with Rev. 20:11.

C. When Jesus comes he will judge both the wicked and the righteous. This will be after the thousand years. (Rev. 20:12-15).

1. **2Thes. 1:6-10.** Christ will “*recompense affliction to them that afflict you ...at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance. They “shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction ... When he shall come to be glorified in his saints.*”
Note that both the righteous and the wicked are to be at this judgment (Rev 20:12-15)
2. **Matt. 16:27.** “*The son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; then shall he render to every man according to his deeds.” (cf. Rev. 20:11-15)*
3. **Matt. 25:31-46.**

31 But *when* the Son of man shall *come* in his glory, and all the angels with him, ***then*** shall he *sit on the throne* of his glory: 32 and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall *separate them* one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the *eternal fire* which is prepared for the devil and his angels: 46 And these shall go away into *eternal punishment*: but the righteous into eternal life. (cf. Rev 20:11-15)

4. Rom. 2:5-9. In the “***day*** of wrath and revelation” of the righteous judgment of God some will receive eternal life and others wrath, rendered to every man according to his works. This indicates both the righteous and the wicked are judged at the same time. (Rev. 20:11-15)

II. An examination of Revelation 20 (the only passage that mentions the thousand years) casts serious doubt on a pre-millennial coming.

A. The absence of any clear evidence of a pre-millennial coming.

1. It does not say that Jesus comes personally before the thousand years.

Rev 19:19 speaks of “*The Word of God*” going forth to war against the *beast*. The context indicates this is the beast with the seven heads and ten horns (Rev 13). Revelation 17 shows this is figurative. This is not speaking of Jesus having literal sword sticking out of his mouth, riding in heaven on a literal white horse, treading a literal winepress or making a literal supper of the carcasses of men! This may simply represent his triumph through his word.

2. The text says nothing about Jesus sitting on a literal earthly throne.

It speaks of beheaded souls seated on thrones reigning “*with Christ*.” It does not say whether these are in heaven or on earth.

Kings do not have to be in the same location while reigning with each other. We are already “kings” (Rev 1:6) reigning with Christ upon the earth (Rev 5:10).

B. Some statements in the text do not harmonize with the Pre-millennial position.

1. The text of Rev. 19 indicates the victory of the “*Word of God*” over the “*beast*” (Rev. 19) has already passed

The “*beast*” is clearly the Roman Empire, and the harlot riding on it was the city of Rome which reigned over the kings of the earth (Rev 17). The Roman Empire no longer exists. Therefore, the coming of the “*Word of God*” to destroy the “*beast*” has already past. Since Christ has not returned and the Rome no longer exists, Rev. 19 is past and it is clear that the coming of the “*Word of God*” to destroy the beast cannot be the future return of Christ.

2. Another problem with a pre-millennial coming is that this would make more than one return of Christ.

According to that view:

- a. Christ comes “**for** his saints,” (the rapture) before the “Great Tribulation”
- b. Christ comes “**with** his saints” to set up his kingdom to reign for a thousand years after the “Great Tribulation.”

The New Testament speaks only of one future coming of Christ.

OBJECTION:

How could the devil be bound for a thousand years if Christ did not come personally?

ANSWER:

Revelation is written in symbolic language. It makes no sense that God is going to use a literal chain to bind a literal seven-head ten-horned dragon who has a tail that casts a literal third part of the stars to earth, (Rev. 12) and uses a literal key to open a literal pit to put him in. This has reference to Satan working through Rome. The horns, head etc are symbols related to Rome. (Rev. 17)

The purpose of his being “*bound*” is “*that he should not deceive the nations.*” At the end of the thousand years he is again loosed to resume deceiving the nations resulting in them going “*up over the breadth of the earth, and compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city.*”

It makes more sense that this “binding” of Satan, has to do with Satan’s being bound from working through Roman imperialism to deceive the nations into suppressing God’s people (Rev. 12:17; 13:6, 15; 16:13, 14; 20:7-9; Dan. 7:21, 25).

The “*thousand years*” represents a long period of time in which the gospel is freely preached throughout the world (Matt. 24:14) and covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9).

Around 1800 the Holy Roman empire came to an end under the pressure of Napoleon. Perhaps the Devil was then “*bound*,” from using being able to deceive the nations into suppression of the Gospel. We may already have entered the “Millennium.” Certainly one power after another has been opened up to God’s word.

OBJECTION: If we conclude that Jesus is not coming for at least another thousand years, does not this remove one of the most important incentives for becoming a Christian?

ANSWER:

Since Paul plainly told the Thessalonians that they were not to be deceived into thinking that the “*day of Christ*” was “*just at hand*,” apparently God did not consider it vital that one have the imminence of Christ’s return hanging over him in order to keep him in line (1Thes. 2:1-12).

The fact is, that it is no less vital to be prepared, whether Jesus was to come that day, or one, two or even three thousand years in the future. At any time our lives may be cut short by the “*sleep*” of the body in death and like the five foolish

virgins, there will be no more opportunity to prepare after we awake (Matt. 25:1-10). So far as each of us is concerned, the coming of our Lord is just as imminent as the hour of death. At that moment the spirit we will depart to be with him (Phil. 1:23) and when he returns, he will bring us with him to receive our new bodies (1Thes. 4:14-17; 5:10). Thus, whether we wake or sleep, we must be ready.

CONCLUSION:

1. When Jesus comes, the earth will pass away. This will occur AFTER the thousand years (Rev. 20:11).
2. When Jesus comes, both the righteous and the wicked will be raised and see him coming. This will take place AFTER the thousand years (Rev. 20:11-15).
3. When Jesus comes, he will judge both the righteous and the wicked. This will take place after the thousand years (Rev. 20:11).
4. Even the text in which the thousand years is mentioned fails to declare a personal return of Jesus before the thousand years to sit on a literal earthly throne.

SECTION TWO – PREMILLENNIAL PROBLEMS

I. It Confuses the “*false prophet*” (Rev. 19:20; 13:11-14) with the “Anti-Christ.”

The Antichrist was already in the world at the time of John (1Jn 4:3). John said that antichrist was anyone who denied that Jesus had come in the flesh. John was writing to combat the Gnostics who he identifies as *antichrist*. (1Jn. 4:3; 2:18-23; 2Jn 1:7).

The *antichrist* is a “*spirit*” (1Jn 4:3) which had already come. (1John 4:3; 2:18-19)

This does not appear to be the same as the “*Man of Sin*” (2Thes. 2:1-12), which Paul said would sit in the temple of God. He said that this power had already begun to work and would continue until the coming of the Lord. People were already attempting to elevate Peter (1Cor. 1:12; 3:3, 4, 11, 21, 22; Gal. 2:6-11; 1Cor. 9:5), which became the very basis of the Papacy. In time, the Pope claimed “primacy” as “Vicar of Christ,” “Most Holy Father,” and “Head of the church” who professed to speak for Christ. He claimed to be able to bind its laws even in heaven--to have authority over both church and state. It is strange that these pompous claims of Rome have been forgotten so quickly in spite of the millions who have died under his authority.

II. It puts “*great tribulation*” off into the future as only a seven year period.

Matthew does not speak of “**THE** Great Tribulation.” The *tribulation* Matt. 24:21 clearly refers to the destruction of Jerusalem that took place in 70 AD (vss. 15-21, cf. Luke 21:20-24). Jesus answered the question, “*when shall these things be?*” (vss. 1-3 cf. Mk. 13:14-22) Anyone who reads the account of the suffering of the Jews, recorded by Josephus, will have no difficulty recognizing the situation.

History tells us that early Christians heeded this warning, and when the Romans began to surround the city, they fled to Pella and were saved.² The siege was so terrible that, had it continued much longer, every soul in Jerusalem would have perished. However, It appears to me that the “*tribulation*” included not only the destruction of the city but extended to the whole period that Jerusalem was trod down by the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). The statement that it would be the greatest that has ever happened or ever would happen seems to indicate something much greater than took place on that single occasion. The tribulation of the Jews was a long-range consequence—all the time that Jerusalem was trampled down by the gentiles. The horrible tribulation of the Jews over the centuries, right down to the Hitler’s holocaust better fits the case.

Rev. 7:14 speaks of a great multitude who had come out of “*great tribulation*” (Greek) and washed their robes in the blood of the lamb. A careful analysis of this from chapter four through seven indicates that it is speaking of the great influx into the church following the terrible Roman persecutions of the first few centuries after Christ. This was prior to the great invasions of barbarians that swept across Rome in successive waves (Alaric, Geneseric, Attila and Odoacer) bringing about the fall of the old empire (Rev. 8). It was followed by the Arabian and Turkish destruction of the Eastern part of the empire. (Rev. 9:1-11).

Note that Rev. 7:14 does not fit the pre-millennial dispensationalist picture of Revelation. These people have ALREADY come out of great tribulation, whereas dispensationalists would have us to believe that the great tribulation does not end until the end of chapter 19.

III. It grossly distorts the “Rapture”

Futurists commonly teach that when Jesus comes “for his saints” he takes them to heaven before “the Great Tribulation” and after seven years brings them back to reign upon the earth for a thousand years. However, 1Thes. 4:13-17, which they claim is the “rapture,” speaks of Jesus bringing the dead “*with him.*” At that time the bodies are raised and they are caught away to be “*ever with the Lord.*” Two returns of Christ with the righteous in heaven between, is foreign to scripture.

This error gives rise to another even more serious difficulty--the problem of what to do with the “*first resurrection.*” (Rev. 20:4-6) If we accept the claim that chapter 19 presents the literal coming of Christ to sit on an earthly throne, then the dead must already have been raised because the living will not go to be with Christ before the dead (1Thes. 4:13-17). Either we accept this as being the time of the “*first resurrection*” or we must claim that John was wrong about Rev. 20:5, being the “*first.*” If we accept it to be the first, then we are confronted with the problem that Revelation 20 provides no “rapture” to heaven and no coming “*with his saints*” prior to the Millennium. This is fatal to the whole grand theory. Jesus takes his saints home in Rev. 20:11-15; 21:1-4 AFTER the thousand years.

IV. It misrepresents the events of the Millennial period in Revelation 20

The fact is that Revelation 20 says nothing about Jesus sitting on an earthly throne for a thousand years. In fact, nowhere in the Bible does it say that Christ will sit on an earthly

² Eusebius’s Church History, Book 3, Chapter 5; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Series, Vol. I

throne. Those claims are made on the basis of highly speculative inferences, tying scriptures together to make the view tenable.

For example, Jesus was promised to sit on the throne of David. David's throne was upon earth. Therefore, it is assumed that Christ must sit on an earthly throne. However, the analogy fails with little examination. David sat in an earthly temple

Some teach that the wicked will be raised and have an opportunity to accept Christ for a thousand years. Not one word indicates that in Rev. 20. Rather, it plainly says, "*the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were finished.*" The martyrs "*lived*" (vs. 4) and this is called a "resurrection." The "*rest of the dead lived not...*" Only the martyrs were "resurrected." The idea that others than Christians will be raised and given an opportunity to repent during the one-thousand years is not only absent from the text--it is in direct conflict with it. The "*first*" resurrection is confined to those who are "*holy.*" (vs. 6)

V. The claim that all world governments will be removed and replaced by the kingdom of God does not hold up.

The first problem with this is the idea that Jesus is going to set up a literal earthly political system. Jesus plainly said that his kingdom was not of this world so as to need to be established by force (John. 18:36). Rather, the kingdom is like planting seed (the word of God) which grows and in the end of the world is harvested (Matt. 13:19, 24, 31; Luke. 8:10, 11). The kingdom does not come with observation so that someone can say, "*lo here or lo, there.*" The kingdom is "*within you*" (Luke. 17:20-21). Jesus rules and reigns in the hearts of his people.

The claim that the nations are abolished is further refuted by the plain statements in Rev. 20:3, 8 that the nations remain intact through the thousand years and at the end are deceived. Christ, through his word, establishes an unbreakable rule in the heart of his people, but nothing is said of his establishing an earthly political system to replace the nations.

VI. It claims that Christ has no kingdom now and will not reign upon his throne until the Millennium.

The kingdom came to men with power on the day of Pentecost (Mk. 9:1; Luke 24:49; Ac. 1:3, 4, 6, 8; 2:1-4). They were "*translated into the kingdom of his [God's] dear son*" and became "*partakers*" as "*citizens*" in the "*new nation*" (Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9, 6; Eph. 2:19; 1Pet. 2:10). Like Melchizedek (Ps. 110:1-4; Heb. 6:20; 7:1, 2, 11-28; 8:1-6), Jesus became both "*priest and king*" upon "*his*" throne (Zech. 6:13) at the "*right hand of God*" (Eph. 1:20). Jesus is now sitting on the throne of David, which by promise properly belongs to him (Ac. 2:30-36) with full authority as both "*Lord and Christ*" (cf. Ac. 10:38; Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 9:5; 10:10). He will reign there till the defeat of death, the last enemy (1Cor. 15:23-36; Rev. 20:12-15).

This decisively ends all reasonable debate. Jesus went to heaven and sat down on the right hand of God. He will sit there until all of his enemies are put under his feet (Acts 2:30-36). The last the last enemy to be destroyed is death (1Cor. 15:23-26). Death is not destroyed until

after the thousand years are finished (Rev. 20:12-15). It is therefore absolutely certain that Jesus is not going to come to earth during the thousand years and reign on an earthly throne.