

What Problems Does Premillennialism Face In Revelation 20?

Ezra 7:11-12

Revelation 20:4-6

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Faithfulness to Christ and His truth will not gain one popularity and applause with a backsliding and compromising church or a hostile world. In fact, an earnest resolve to hold fast to that which the faithful church throughout history has attained (as we are commanded to do in Revelation 2:25; 3:3,11), and a firm commitment to testify against all corruption and backsliding in church and state (as is true of the two witnesses in Revelation 11, who represent the faithful church in history as a testifying church), this faithfulness to Christ and His truth will almost certainly bring the assaults of the enemy to silence that pure testimony for Christ. In this present period of history in which we are living, the faithful church is said to be in the wilderness (according to Revelation 12:6), and the majority within the church at large will not want to be associated with or identify with a church that testifies against the corruption and backsliding that exists in church and state.

The cry of the majority is this, “Why can’t these two witnesses of Revelation 11 just learn to get along with the majority in church and state?” I’ll tell you why. They don’t count heads to determine what is true or false, or what is right or wrong. They determine what is true and what is right on the basis of what God says in Scripture (Isaiah 8:20). They are more concerned with following Christ and with walking in the footsteps of the faithful who have preceded them, than they are in finding a comfortable place with the majority.

The faithful two witnesses (of Revelation 11) are after all spoken of as

only two in number (in part to indicate their relatively small minority status), and they have always been willing to be unpopular and to be a minority, if being a minority means being faithful to Christ and His truth. **Noah**, a preacher of righteousness, was in the minority and was not popular, and he condemned the world at that time for its backsliding. **Joshua and Caleb** were only two faithful witnesses, who were in the minority and were not popular, but they stood against the unbelief of all Israel in testifying that God had promised and would deliver the Canaanites into their hands. **Gideon** had only 300 men (equipped with a lamp, an empty pitcher, and a trumpet), and was vastly outnumbered by the Midianites (who had at least 120,000 men), and yet Gideon soundly defeated God's enemies. **Elijah** was only one solitary faithful prophet who stood against an entire nation of idolaters in Israel (under Ahab), and he was certainly not popular, but he called down fire from heaven, and all of the false prophets of Baal were slain. How many of God's faithful witnesses were in the minority and were very unpopular, and yet did not judge what testimony they should bear or not bear by a public opinion poll or by what was popular with the majority? Jesus even described the way that leads to death as one that is broad and many walk that broad road, Jesus said. However, there is also a narrow way that leads to everlasting life, but it is narrow, and only a few walk that road in comparison to the many that walk the broad road. The pope is in Lebanon even now proclaiming the position of the majority: the toleration of all religions (which is the legal promotion of all religions) contrary to the First Commandment.

Dear young person, the peer pressure is intense to walk the broad path with the majority in order to be accepted—the pressure to engage in sex, pornography, ungodly music, vulgar language, parties, and drugs. It is like swimming upstream against a mighty current to resist the pressure of the

majority who worship sports, education, their jobs, their cars, and worship their own “freedom” to resist their parents and God Himself. Dear young people, I declare to you in the name of the God who cannot lie that the grace of God to keep you from the clutches of sin and temptation that is dragging the majority down the broad path to hell, that almighty grace of Jesus Christ is infinitely greater to keep and preserve you. Fall upon Christ and His amazing grace today (even now), and He will make you a faithful witness for Christ rather than a mere clone of the majority to be used and abused by the devil.

Something else that is very popular among the majority within churches today is the premillennial view of end-time prophecy, namely, that Jesus Christ will bodily return as King of kings and Lord of lords and will bodily resurrect the dead in Christ to reign with Him upon earth BEFORE the millennium. The majority proclaim this view of prophecy from pulpits, radio, tv, books, movies, and the internet throughout the world (it’s everywhere). And yet I submit to you that once again the majority are wrong. We have already seen in the past two sermons that a premillennial bodily Second Coming of Christ is not taught in Revelation 19, and that Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **does not come visibly and bodily** riding upon a white horse in Revelation 19. To the contrary, Christ comes **figuratively** riding upon a white horse as conquering King in order to judge His enemies; and by His Word and His Spirit, He uses converted nations to destroy the civil beast, the papal false prophet, and their followers before the inauguration of the millennium upon earth.

This Lord’s Day we will continue to expose the errors and scriptural problems with premillennialism as we briefly consider the resurrection of the faithful martyrs of Christ that is described in Revelation 20. The main

points for the sermon this Lord's Day are the following two questions: (1) What Problems Does Premillennialism Face in Revelation 20:4-6? (2) What Does Revelation 20:4-6 Actually Prophecy Will Occur in the Millennium?

I. **What Problems Does Premillennialism Face in Revelation 20:4-6?**

A. As we begin a brief investigation of Revelation 20:4-6, I want to affirm without reservation that I believe in the bodily resurrection of all the dead in Christ. I simply do not believe that there is a bodily resurrection taught in Revelation 20:4-6, which means there will be no bodily resurrection BEFORE the millennium (as Premils allege to be the case). I believe the bodily resurrection of all the dead (both righteous and wicked alike according to John 5:28,29) occurs AFTER the millennium (as we see in Revelation 20:11-15), and occurs on the "last day" (as is taught in John 6:39; John 11:24).

B. Let us now consider the following problems with the premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:4-6. Read it.

1. **The First Problem.** If "the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5) is a **bodily** resurrection of all Christians who have died (as is alleged by Premils), and since to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (in Revelation 20:4) is clearly identified as "the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5), then how do Premils explain the fact that there are enemies that assault those who have already been (allegedly) raised bodily from the dead in Revelation 20:7.

a. For consider that the reign of these saints in "the first resurrection" is clearly stated to last for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-5), and that this "first resurrection" reign of these saints with Christ occurs during the same period of time that Satan is bound for a thousand

years (Revelation 20:1-3). But after the thousand years have expired, Satan (as the arch-enemy of God's people) is released, and he deceives the nations, and they as multitudes of enemies encompass the camp of the saints (Revelation 20:7-9).

b. How is it (according to the Premil position) that glorified saints in resurrected bodies can be encompassed and besieged by enemies such as Satan and all the deceived and wicked nations that follow him and that are yet in their mortal bodies here upon the earth (in Revelation 20:7-9), when **all enemies** of Christ will be **forever** destroyed at the bodily Second Coming of Christ when Christians will be raised bodily from the grave, death being the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:24-26)? The Premil cannot biblically have it both ways: the bodily resurrection of believers in glorified bodies before the millennium (as they falsely teach), and yet enemies that assault believers after the millennium (which is what the Scripture teaches will happen in Revelation 20:7-9).

2. **The Second Problem.** If "the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5) is a **bodily** resurrection (as is alleged in premillennialism), and since to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (in Revelation 20:4) is clearly identified as "the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5), then how can such a living and reigning with Christ in a resurrected body be terminated after the thousand years are expired (as is stated in Revelation 20:7-9)?

a. How can those who share in this "first resurrection" for one thousand years by way of a bodily resurrection (as claimed by Premils) cease to share in this "first resurrection" by way of a bodily resurrection once the thousand years have expired? For whatever one interprets "the first resurrection" to be, God is clear that it lasts for one thousand figurative years and no longer ("and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" Revelation 20:4; "This is the first resurrection"

Revelation 20:5). For “when the thousand years are expired” (Revelation 20:7), “the first resurrection” (wherein the saints live and reign with Christ) comes to an end.

b. And so for any interpretive system to allow what they believe to be “the first resurrection” to continue into the period where Satan is released for a “little season” (Revelation 20:7-10) contradicts the plain teaching of Scripture. Dear ones, “the first resurrection” comes to an end, when Satan is released. Thus, do those who were allegedly raised bodily at the beginning of the millennium cease to have a resurrected body once Satan is released?

3. **The Third Problem.** As we examine our text in Revelation 20:4-5, the Holy Spirit does not depict a resurrection of Christians in general (as the Premil interpretive system teaches).

a. Carefully observe that it is rather a resurrection of only martyrs that is in view here in Revelation 20:4. This is not a resurrection of believers in general. However, such a limited resurrection is completely inconsistent with the all-inclusive language we find in other places of Scripture when referring to the bodily resurrection of believers that will occur at the bodily Second Coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22-23,51-52; John 5:28-29; John 6:40). Thus, this limited language of the martyr’s resurrection in Revelation 20 ought to turn us away from seeing “the first resurrection” in Revelation 20:4-6 as a bodily resurrection of all Christians in general (as Premils teach).

b. Therefore, unless Premils are willing to interpret Revelation 20:4-6 as a bodily resurrection of only martyrs (as they are the only group mentioned in the text), they should abandon their position of a bodily resurrection in Revelation 20 altogether.

C. And as a brief side note, I submit that not only premillennialism, but other eschatological positions (like amillennialism

and preterism) likewise face similar problems in their interpretation of Revelation 20:4-6. For all those who would understand “the first resurrection” described in Revelation 20:4-6 to be not a bodily resurrection like premils, but a spiritual resurrection of the spirit or the soul of believers at their regeneration, likewise face some serious problems in Revelation 20.

1. Before looking more closely at these problems, I want to first affirm that I do believe that there is a real spiritual resurrection that God sovereignly works in the hearts of His elect while they are yet dead in their trespasses and sins. Just as there was no life in the body of Lazarus until Christ cried out, “Lazarus, come forth”, and just as Lazarus could not respond to Christ until Christ gave him new life, so no sinner being dead in his trespasses and sins can trust in Christ, love Christ, or respond in obedience to Christ until he is first “born again” (John 3:3), regenerated (Titus 3:5) or spiritually raised from the dead (John 5:24-25; Ephesians 2:5). However, **I do not** believe that “the first resurrection” of Revelation 20:4-6 is referring to the spiritual regeneration of God’s elect upon the earth. Why?

2. If “the first resurrection” and the living and reigning of saints with Christ for a thousand years is the spiritual regeneration of God’s elect (as this position alleges), then when the thousand years of “the first resurrection” has come to an end (as is taught in Revelation 20:7), the spiritual resurrection and regeneration of God’s people would likewise come to an end. For “the first resurrection” and the reigning with Christ only lasts for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-5), and then when the thousand years of “the first resurrection” in which God’s people live and reign with Christ comes to an end, Satan is released. Now of course, those who believe “the first resurrection” and the reigning of the saints to be the regeneration of the spirit in God’s elect, do not believe that regeneration in God’s people can ever come to an end. But Revelation 20

teaches that “the first resurrection” and reigning with Christ DOES COME TO AN END. This, I submit, is a very serious problem with any who hold this position.

3. Once again, I submit that this “first resurrection” that is here in view in Revelation 20:4-6 is only stated to be a resurrection of faithful martyrs of Christ (who have already been regenerated and raised spiritually from the dead), rather than a spiritual resurrection of all those who are dead in trespasses and sins and who come to life spiritually for the very first time.

a. Our text teaches that this is a resurrection of those who were slain and persecuted for their testimony for Jesus Christ (Revelation 20:5). Thus, these martyrs who come to life are not regenerated in this “first resurrection”, unless those who hold this view also want to teach that God’s elect can be regenerated more than once (just as we are only born naturally once, so we can only be born spiritually once, John 3:3-7). In order for this “first resurrection” to be a spiritual regeneration, it would be necessary that those resurrected here should be haters and despisers of Christ, not faithful martyrs of Christ.

b. This is further confirmed in the Book of Revelation by the fact that the same “souls” of the martyrs that partake in “the first resurrection” by living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years (in Revelation 20:4-6), these same “souls” of the faithful martyrs are seen and heard earlier in the Book of Revelation pleading with God that they might receive judgment over their enemies (in Revelation 6:9-11). They finally do receive that judgment over their enemies in “the first resurrection” when they live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-5). Thus, I submit that “the first resurrection” of saints and their living and reigning with Christ (in Revelation 20:4-5) comes AFTER their martyrdom and not BEFORE their martyrdom; and therefore “the first resurrection” cannot be a spiritual resurrection in regeneration.

II. What Does Revelation 20:4-6 Actually Prophecy Will Occur in the Millennium?

A. This will be a very brief description in comparison to a 34 part sermon series that I preached a few years ago (which you can consult if you desire). I submit that what is described in figurative language here in Revelation 20:4-6 is a figurative resurrection and coming to life of the martyrs of Jesus that is realized in the triumphs and victories of future generations of Christians who bear the same martyr spirit in their lives and who live and reign in all of the nations of the world. It is not a bodily resurrection of the same martyrs that were slain, nor a spiritual resurrection in regeneration of the same martyrs that were slain. Whereas under Pagan Rome and Papal Rome the faithful Church of Christ is depicted as persecuted, fleeing for safety, and slain at the hands of her enemies (Revelation 6-13), when Papal Rome and her allies are crushed and defeated by Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 14-19), the faithful Church of Christ (as the true spiritual posterity of the martyrs) comes to life throughout the world in every nation in a way unparalleled in history, which is here (in Revelation 20:4-5) pictured figuratively as a resurrection from the dead of those slain martyrs in the worldwide victory of their spiritual posterity. This figurative resurrection of the martyrs in their spiritual posterity is the greatest worldwide reformation that will ever occur in history. Just as John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

B. Such a figurative resurrection upon earth of God's faithful martyrs in their spiritual descendants after a period of captivity, persecution (martyrdom), and subjugation under the feet of their enemies is found in other places in Scripture as well (Ezekiel 37:11-14;

Hosea 6:1-3; Romans 11:15; Revelation 11: 10-15). The victorious reign of God's people (that is figuratively prophesied to come here in Revelation 20:4-6) will be a reign upon earth (not in heaven), according to Revelation 5:10: "and we shall reign ON THE EARTH."

Dear ones, the reward promised to the martyrs who loved not their lives even unto death was that they would be vindicated in their testimony for Christ and that there would come from that faithful testimony for Christ a triumphant posterity that would fill the earth, bringing all the nations unto Christ by the gospel and power of the Holy Spirit. Do you not desire such a triumphant posterity to follow you? Dear ones, faithfulness and obedience to Christ have reward and blessing to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:9). Are we so concerned with our present comforts and relationships with family and friends that we have forgotten the effect of our testimony upon posterity for generations to come? Dear Christian, we will not only reap the rich supply of heavenly blessings for a faithful life and testimony for Christ and His truth, but generations to come will likewise reap the benefit and reward of our willingness to walk the narrow path (even if it is unpopular with the majority).

Let us, dear ones, not cower or be ashamed of Christ or His truth. Let us stand fast. Let us hold to the truth revealed in Scripture, even if we stand alone and the whole world stands against us. Let us all be as Athanasius, that great defender of the biblical and orthodox position of the Trinity, who when he was told that the world was against him for his immovable commitment to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, he said, "If the whole world is against Athanasius, then Athanasius is against the world."

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