

The Thousand Year Reign

In **Revelation 20:4**, John recorded: “Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped 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 for a thousand years” (ESV).

Are we looking for a thousand year kingdom on earth as our premillennial friends suggest? Are we looking to progress into a golden age as our postmillennial friends suggest? Does this simply refer to the age of Christ’s church on earth and we are in a figurative thousand year reign right now as many of my Christian friends suggest?

I’d like to share another possibility for your consideration.

For a long time, I have wondered if one of the main problems we have with the book of Revelation is we too often allow our dispensational premillennialist friends to define the playing field. They have guilted us for thinking a great deal of this book is figurative; so we try to make as much of it as literal as possible. We get to this chapter and try to figure out some way it actually fits into a historical timeline. We may fudge on the thousand years, but we are looking for all of this to somehow pan out literally and therefore miss the real point of the whole picture. What if the picture isn’t intended to give us a timeline of events, but simply drive home that in the end God wins? What if, in this chapter, we aren’t looking at a literal resurrection, thousand years, second death, battle, etc.? What if we are simply supposed to see a vision of God’s beloved city attacked by phenomenal enemies, but then see them victorious?

I suggest that the thousand year reign is not meant to be seen as a literal period of time in history. Rather it is driving home the true victory of God’s people in contrast with the seeming victory of our enemies. These last chapters of Revelation are a tale of two cities. We must not pick out one section of it and lose sight of the rest. In **Revelation 17:12**, John says: “And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who...are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast” (ESV).

Toward the end of this vision, God calls to mind the martyrs under the altar from **Revelation 6:9-11** who asked “How long?” Then He provides a contrast. While going through the persecution, it seems eternal. But how long do the enemies actually have authority? An hour (obviously not a literal time table). Once this hour is up and victory belongs to Christ’s people, including the martyrs, how long do they reign? A thousand years.

Considering the fact that our true reign is forever and ever (see **Revelation 22:5**), why would we take either of the numbers in **Revelation 17:12** or **20:4** literally or remotely try to make them so? The picture is comparative. The martyrs ask how long and are told to wait a little longer. But in the end we find out that their endurance of persecution is a mere hour in comparison to a thousand years of victory.

The lesson: When enemies oppose Christ’s city, they may gain the upper hand for an hour, but we will reign for a thousand years. Hang on to Christ no matter what. In the end, He wins! Praise the Lord!