

# **God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #14 (Pt. 2)**

Revelation 20:4-6  
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We continue this Lord's Day with our study of the Amillennial interpretive system. If you are just joining us in this series or are fuzzy as to what the distinguishing characteristics of the Amil system are, I refer you back to the previous sermon in this series for that preliminary background information.

By way of summary, let me simply note that Amillennial literally means "no millennium". However, it is not accurate to state that Amils deny there is a millennium in any sense. Amils do affirm there is a millennium (i.e. a figurative thousand year reign of the saints with Christ); however, Amils affirm that it is not a reign of the saints upon earth, but rather a reign of the saints after death in heaven with Christ (during the intermediate state, i.e. the state of the soul of believers between death and the final resurrection). All those who die in Christ (after the resurrection of Christ) enter into that heavenly millennium according to Amils. Thus, in the Amil system, there is no prophetic hope or confident anticipation that Israel as a nation (along with the nations of the world) will be converted to Christ to live and reign in Christ's glory upon the earth. We considered in the previous sermon the errors of Amils in their interpretation of Romans 11 (as it relates to the restoration of Israel), and the errors found in the Amil system in their interpretation of Revelation 20:1-3. Today we move on in our study of Revelation chapter 20 to focus our attention more specifically upon verses 4-6. From these verses we shall (by God's grace) seek to unfold and make clear the teaching of Christ and demonstrate how the Amil system errs and does not do justice to this portion of Holy Scripture. Our main points today shall be stated in

the form of two questions that must be answered from Revelation 20:4-6.

## I. Where Do The Saints Reign? In Heaven Or Upon Earth?

A. Listen to the inspired words of the Holy Spirit as found in **Revelation 20:4**, “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

B. According to the Amil system, this vision received by the Apostle John pictures the reign of saints in heaven. Why? Because the John says, “and I saw the **SOULS** of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” In other words, it is the souls of these dead martyrs of Christ that the Amillennialist says are seated upon thrones and reign with Christ for a figurative thousand year period. And where do the souls of dead martyrs (as well as the souls of all believers in Christ) go after death? Well, of course, the souls of Christians at death are immediately glorified and ascend into the very presence of Christ in heaven. Thus, the Amillennialist concludes that since souls of the dead in Christ do not remain upon the earth, this figurative thousand year reign of the saints must be in heaven. At first glance, this interpretation of the Amil system does seem strong and convincing, but there are some significant problems as we shall see.

C. Let us first review what was said in the previous sermon about the binding of Satan (or the Divine restraint of Satan) upon earth for a thousand years (in Revelation 20:1-3).

1. This binding or restraining of Satan is said to be for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2). I agree with the Amillennialist that the prophetic thousand year period is most likely a figurative number of years pointing to a long extended and complete period of time (much like we see in other portions of God's Word where the number "thousand" [or "millennium" in Latin] is used in a figurative sense to refer to a number that is both extensive and complete—for example, Deuteronomy 1:11; **Deuteronomy 7:9**; 1 Chronicles 16:15; **Psalm 50:10**; **Psalm 84:10**; Psalm 105:8; **Ecclesiastes 6:6**; Isaiah 60:22).

2. This binding of Satan for a thousand (or millennium) of years is clearly related to earth (and not to heaven) in as much as Satan is said by the Apostle John to be bound or restrained "that he should deceive **THE NATIONS** no more, till the thousand years be fulfilled" (Revelation 20:3). Since no one can be or ever has been deceived in heaven, we must conclude that the binding of Satan for a thousand years relates to a thousand (or millennium) of years upon the earth and not in heaven. The Amil interpretation of Revelation 20:1-3 likewise agrees that the binding of Satan for a figurative millennium occurs on the earth.

3. Furthermore, we noted in the previous sermon that there is a CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP between deception and unbelief and likewise a CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP between the restraint of deception and faith. For deception blinds the eye of understanding to the Gospel. But on the other hand, where the deception of the enemy is restrained, knowledge of the truth and saving faith will follow, whether it be the blinded eyes of a single sinner (as we see in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6) or whether it be the blinded eyes of a wicked nation or nations (as we see is true of Israel in 2 Corinthians 3:14-16; Romans 11:25). What is the point? Simply this: We should see a CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP between the restraining of Satan so that he cannot deceive the NATIONS OF THE WORLD that live upon the earth for a thousand figurative years in Revelation 20:1-3 (that is the Divine Cause), and the reigning of the

Visible Church in the NATIONS OF THE WORLD AS CHRISTIAN NATIONS that live upon the earth and who are no longer deceived for a thousand figurative years in Revelation 20:4-6 (that is the Divine Effect). And just as the Divine Cause (i.e. the restraint of Satan from deceiving the nations) is upon the earth, so likewise the Divine Effect (i.e. the reigning of the Visible Church in the NATIONS OF THE WORLD AS CHRISTIAN NATIONS) is likewise upon the earth. When Satan is bound or restrained by Christ so that he cannot deceive the NATIONS any longer for a figurative millennium of years, those NATIONS OF THE WORLD will turn in faith to Christ and be brought into the Visible Church of Christ. In other words, if Satan is bound upon earth so that he cannot deceive the NATIONS OF THE WORLD any longer until the figurative millennium of years has expired, we should expect to read of some great spiritual triumph and victory occurring on the earth among the nations during that figurative millennium of years in Revelation 20. And that is exactly what we do find in what follows in the vision which the Apostle John beheld in Revelation 20:4-6 after the devil is restrained by Christ from deceiving the NATIONS OF THE WORLD during that entire millennium of years. Because Satan is bound upon the earth for a thousand years, the NATIONS reign in triumph upon the same earth for the same thousand year period of time. And when that Divine restraint is removed from Satan after the millennium so that he can once again deceive the NATIONS OF THE WORLD that live upon the earth, is there not likewise an effect upon the Visible Church that lives upon the earth? Of course there is, as we see in Revelation 20:7-10, which we shall further develop in the next sermon. Dear ones, I submit it is the earth (and not heaven) that is the stage upon which the Visible Church reigns in the NATIONS OF THIS WORLD during the figurative millennium in Revelation 20:4-6.

4. Finally, I do not understand what the relationship is according to the Amil system between Satan's binding for a figurative millennium of years upon earth and the reigning of martyred saints for

the same figurative millennium of years in heaven. What does Satan's restraint upon earth have to do with the saints' reign in heaven for the same period of time? Or how does Satan's restraint upon earth cause or lead to the reign of martyred Christians in heaven? I do not see the relationship in the Amil system between these two events that both occur in the figurative millennium. This (in my judgment) is a significant problem for the Amil system. However, I clearly see the relationship between Satan's restraint and the saints' reigning as a DIVINE CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP in the Postmil system (as I have explained it), if both of these prophesied events occur upon the earth.

D. Having considered the DIVINE CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIP UPON EARTH of Satan's restraint and the saints' reign, let us now consider more carefully the words of the vision that John relates in Revelation 20:4 to further confirm that the millennial reign here spoken of is not in heaven, but is rather upon the earth. **Revelation 20:4**, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

1. Who are those who sat upon these thrones and reigned for a figurative millennium of years? Clearly, they who sat upon the thrones and to whom judgment was given so that they reigned a thousand years are martyrs ("and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads"). The book of Revelation is filled with comfort and encouragement to martyrs who will not give up their testimony for Christ's truth at the loss of possessions, family or friends, or

at the loss of their own lives. Such a truth pierces into our own hearts as well asking each one of us, “What are you willing to sacrifice in order to be faithful to Christ and His truth?” These martyrs in Revelations 20:4 actually consist of two groups that lived under two persecuting Roman systems of government: **PAGAN ROME** which persecuted and BEHEADED many of the martyrs of Christ with the sword; and **PAPAL ROME** which persecuted and slew the faithful who would not worship the Papal beast, nor his image, nor receive his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands. We see the first group of martyrs in Revelation 6:9-11 as “under the altar”, signifying that they had shed their blood for their faithful testimony to Christ and His truth. Here John sees the souls of these martyred Christians who were slain under PAGAN ROME crying out for God’s righteous judgment and holy vindication to be given them for their testimony for Christ and His truth. Now note what was told these martyrs in heaven. They were told that they should rest for a while longer in heaven UNTIL another group of martyrs should likewise be slain for their testimony for Christ and His truth (Revelation 6:11). This second group of martyrs that should be slain after the first group were slain by PAGAN ROME and are referred to in Revelation 20:4 as those who did not worship the Papal beast or his image (also note this second class of martyrs Revelation 13:7,15-17; Revelation 17:6). Now what I would have you see is that God’s righteous judgment and vindication of their blood and testimony is SOUGHT by the martyrs in heaven in Revelations 6:9-11, but it is not GIVEN to them in heaven. For they are told to wait. Thus, if these martyred Christians are in heaven, and they are told to wait for judgment to be given to them, it must mean that they do not receive judgment in a heavenly millennium, but rather in an earthly millennium.

2. When is judgment given to these martyred Christians? According to Revelation 20:4, John saw the souls of these martyred Christians that were already in heaven come alive and reign with Christ for a figurative millennium of years. These martyred Christians sit upon

thrones and receive judgment and vindication not while in heaven, but when they are restored to life and reign with Christ for a figurative millennium of years upon earth. Thus, you can see that the martyrs receive judgment at a different period of time than when they first sought judgment in heaven (back in Revelation 6:9-11).

3. This is a real problem for the Amil interpretive system. How can the souls of the martyrs be said to receive judgment immediately IN HEAVEN upon their death (in Revelation 20:4) when the same souls of the martyrs in heaven are denied that very judgment until a future period of time (Revelation 6:9-11)? The martyrs in heaven cannot immediately receive judgment and reign with Christ, and at the same time in heaven be denied that judgment (and by implication, reign with Christ) until a future period of time. However, the Postmillennial interpretive system resolves this difficulty as we shall see by explaining that the martyrs in heaven are temporarily denied the judgment for which they plead until the figurative millennium of years upon earth, at which time these martyrs will be raised up in a great spiritual posterity that will come to life and reign with Christ.

## II. What Is 'The First Resurrection'?

A. The "first resurrection" is stated to be by the Apostle John the coming to life of both groups of martyrs who live and reign with Christ for a figurative thousand years. **Revelation 20:4**, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they [i.e. both groups of martyrs—GLP] lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." And then in **Revelation 20:5**, "This is the first resurrection."

1. Now as we have seen, these martyrs have already been living in heaven while awaiting judgment to be given to them (according to Revelation 6:9-11). The Amil system must answer these questions. How do these martyrs who are already living in heaven (according to Revelation 6:9-11) have a resurrection in heaven and come to life in heaven (as the Amils teach from Revelation 20:4-5)? This seems to be flatly contradicted by the words of Christ in John 11:25-26 (which teach that those who die in Christ do not undergo the death of their souls, but rather that their souls continue to live in heaven). Where do we ever find in Scripture any reference to a resurrection of souls in heaven? Nowhere. And that is the problem (and insurmountable problem in my judgment) that the Amil system faces. All resurrections of which I am aware in the Scripture refer not to that which occurs in heaven, but that which occurs on earth (as we shall see). And where the resurrection occurs here in Revelation 20:5 (namely, on earth) is where the living and reigning with Christ for a figurative millennium of years in Revelation 20:4 must likewise occur (namely, on earth). For both groups of martyrs are raised and brought to life upon earth for the very purpose and end that they should sit upon thrones, receive judgment, and live and reign with Christ for a figurative millennium of years upon earth.

2. Let us now consider how the Postmillennial interpretive system approaches “the first resurrection” in Revelations 20:4-5.

a. This is a figurative resurrection and coming to life of the martyrs and is realized in the triumphs and victories of future generations of Christians who bear the same martyr spirit in their lives. Whereas under Pagan Rome and Papal Rome the Visible Church is depicted as persecuted and fleeing for safety (Revelation 6-13), when Papal Rome and her allies are crushed and defeated (Revelation 14-19), the faithful Visible Church (as the true spiritual posterity of the martyrs) comes to life in the world in a way unparalleled in history so that it is here (in Revelation 20:4-5) likened to a resurrection from the dead.



b. Such a figurative resurrection upon earth of God's people in coming to life after a period 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). That there will be a reigning with Christ upon the earth in sharing in the glorious triumph and victory of Christ over His enemies in an unparalleled way is likewise alluded to in Revelation 5:10: "and we shall reign ON THE EARTH." This looks forward not to "the new heaven and new earth", but to the figurative millennial reign on earth of the resurrected martyrs in their triumphant posterity and successors.

c. Thus, we see how the Lord will bring the dead to life here upon the earth during the millennial reign with Christ. Let me also note that to reign "with Christ" does not imply that those who reign must be in the very presence of the physical body of Christ. To reign "with Christ" for a thousand years in Revelation 20:4 simply means to share and participate in the triumph and victory of Christ (who reigns in heaven) while the reigning saints are yet upon earth during that figurative millennial period. Just as Enoch walked "with God" (Genesis 5:22) while Enoch was yet upon the earth and God was in heaven as he shared communion with God, and just as believers sup with Christ and He with them (Revelation 3:20) while they are still upon the earth and Christ is in heaven, even so those future saints will reign with Christ while they are upon the earth and Christ is in heaven.

d. I hope you are beginning to see how the Amillennial system simply cannot do justice to the inspired text as found in Revelation 20. We shall visit Revelation 20 one more time in the next sermon and conclude our exposition of that text while at the same time revealing the errors of the Amillennial interpretive system.

Dear ones, we have considered the reward promised to the martyrs who love not their lives even unto death. They are promised a triumphant posterity. Are we not likewise encouraged to be faithful to Christ and His truth in our generation that the Lord might raise up from us a posterity that will do reap from us many future blessings. 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 suffer for Christ now.

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