

God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #15 (Pt. 3)

Revelation 20:7-10
October 25, 2009
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This Lord's Day we continue our study of Revelation chapter 20 as it reveals that future time of unparalleled Gospel prosperity for a figurative period of a thousand years. We have embarked upon this discourse of Revelation 20 with a hope that we might clearly understand the hope of victory that belongs to the Visible Church of Christ during that figurative millennium of years. But we have also gone to this revelation of God's Holy Word intending to evaluate how the Amillennial interpretive system is refuted by its failure to do justice to this portion of Scripture. Remember as we proceed today that the term Amillennial does not mean there is no millennium in any sense, but rather that there is no earthly millennium—only a heavenly millennium. In the previous sermon, two questions were asked and answered from the inspired vision that is found in Revelation 20:4-6 (I refer you back to the previous sermon for a full discussion of these two questions and the responses).

The first question was this: **Where Do The Saints Reign? In Heaven Or Upon Earth?** It was answered from Revelation 20 that the reign of the saints shall be upon earth. Why? First of all because the effect of Satan being restrained from deceiving the nations for a figurative millennium of years upon the earth (Revelation 20:1-3) will be that those very nations will be brought into the Visible Church to reign upon the earth (Revelation 20:4). And secondly because the souls of the martyrs who are seen by way of vision in heaven (Revelation 6:9-11; Revelation 20:4) plead for God's judgment upon Pagan Rome and Papal Rome (Revelation 6:9-11), but do not receive that judgment upon their enemies and reign over their enemies until the prophesied millennium comes (Revelation

20:4). Thus, these martyred saints that are in heaven are not given judgment and do not live and reign with Christ over their enemies while in heaven (but are rather told to wait until the full number to be slain for Christ are slain, Revelation 6:9-11). However, when the millennium comes, they shall be given judgment and shall reign over their enemies here upon the earth which is called “the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:4). We noted that according to the Amillennial position, the millennium in heaven begins with Christ’s resurrection into heaven and continues throughout the present age until the Second Coming of Christ. And so we ask, how is it that in Revelation 6:9-11, Christians who are martyred for the testimony of Christ and His truth have not yet received judgment and are not yet reigning if the millennium has already begun (according to the Amillennialist)? The book of Revelation itself demonstrates how the souls of the martyrs in heaven cannot be said to be waiting for judgment over their enemies (in Revelation 6:9-11) and yet be said to receive judgment over their enemies (Revelation 20:4-5) during the same millennial period. Thus, the period in which the souls of the martyrs await judgment over their enemies must be during this present period of time (Revelation 6:9-11), and the period in which the souls of the martyrs receive judgment over their enemies and live and reign with Christ over their enemies (Revelation 20:4-5) must be in the future millennium at “the first resurrection”, which leads us to the next question that was asked and answered in the previous sermon.

What Is ‘The First Resurrection’? It was answered that it is not a literal, bodily resurrection, but rather a figurative resurrection of the martyrs in a worldwide company of Christians (unparalleled in number) who have the same faithful martyr spirit and heart planted within them by the Holy Spirit (who will come forth from a state of persecution, subjugation, captivity, and death into a state of triumph, victory and Gospel prosperity in unparalleled numbers throughout the world in the spirit and power of

the martyrs like John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, Luke 1:17; Matthew 11:14; Mark 9:11-13). Since the Scripture nowhere else ever speaks of a resurrection (or a coming to life) of souls in heaven, and since all other references in Scripture to a resurrection or coming to life (whether literal or figurative as the case may be) always refer to a resurrection as occurring upon the earth, this figurative resurrection, called “the first resurrection” (in Revelation 20:4-6), must take place on earth and not in heaven (contrary to Amillennialism) .

But before proceeding any farther in expounding today’s text (in Revelation 20:7-10), I would like to further elaborate on “the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:4-6). It was just noted that the word “resurrection” always refers in Scripture to a resurrection upon the earth and not in heaven. But there are three possible interpretations for “the first resurrection” as a resurrection that occurs upon earth: (1) “The first resurrection” is a bodily resurrection, which if it is a bodily resurrection must mean it occurs on earth (the view of Premils); (2) “The first resurrection” is a spiritual resurrection or a spiritual regeneration of the souls of God’s elect from death into life (the view of some Postmils); (3) “The first resurrection” is a figurative resurrection upon earth wherein a group, a company, or a nation that is subdued and defeated (i.e. is dead or silenced as to its earthly, visible testimony and glory), and is then figuratively resurrected and comes to life in an earthly, visible triumph and victory in a subsequent mighty host who bear the same spirit and power of their ancestors and forebearers (the view of Historic Postmils which I believe presents the truth of “the first resurrection” in Revelation 20:4-6).

It has been demonstrated in the previous sermon why “the first resurrection” cannot refer to a resurrection in heaven (per the Amil position). But it is yet to be demonstrated why a bodily resurrection upon

earth of Christians (per the Premil position) or a spiritual regeneration of God's elect upon earth (per the position of some Postmils) may not meet the criteria of "the first resurrection" as revealed in Revelation 20:4-6. Let's see why neither of these two interpretations of "the first resurrection" is warranted from Revelation 20:4-6.

I. Why "the first resurrection" is not a bodily resurrection of Christians (per the Premil position).

A. Now I certainly want to affirm that I believe in the bodily resurrection of all the dead in Christ. I simply do not believe that this bodily resurrection occurs before the millennium (as Premils interpret Revelation 20). I believe the bodily resurrection of all the dead (righteous and wicked alike) occurs after the millennium at the last day (Revelation 20:11-15; John 5:28-29; John 12:48).

B. Let us consider three problems with this view from the text itself.

1. If "the first resurrection" is a bodily resurrection of all Christians who have died, and if (according to Revelation 20:4-5) only those who are raised are said to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years, then how do Premils explain the fact that the living and reigning with Christ in "the first resurrection" is terminated after the thousand years are expired (as we see in Revelation 20:7-9)? 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) while Satan is bound for the same thousand years (Revelation 20:1-3). But after the thousand years have expired, Satan is released, deceives the nations, and encompasses the camp of the saints (Revelation 20:7-9), so that they are no longer living and reigning over their enemies (which living and reigning with Christ over their enemies is "the first resurrection" in Revelation 20:4-5). How is

it (according to the Premil position) that glorified saints in resurrected bodies can be encompassed and besieged by Satan and all the deceived and wicked nations that follow him here upon the earth (Revelation 20:7-9)? Such a notion seems completely incongruous with what is said about the resurrection of the saints in the rest of God's Word. Resurrected believers are forever set free from bondage and subjection to enemies (Romans 8:21). For at the resurrection all enemies of Christ will be forever destroyed, death being the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:24-26—you might want to go back to sermon #12 in this series to review what was noted there in refutation of the Premil interpretive system from 1 Corinthians 15). Thus, this stated period of time (a thousand years) in which the saints live and reign with Christ over their enemies (which is called "the first resurrection") raises some serious interpretive and theological problems once the thousand years end. How do resurrected and glorified saints cease to live and reign with Christ over their enemies and rather to be encompassed by a much greater host of deceived nations that follow Satan in "the little season" after the millennium? If "the first resurrection" is a bodily resurrection and only lasts for one thousand years, do those who share in this "first resurrection" for one thousand years by way of a bodily resurrection cease to share in this "first resurrection" by way of a bodily resurrection once the thousand years are expired? For whatever one interprets "the first resurrection" to be, God is clear that it lasts for one thousand figurative years ("and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" Revelation 20:4; "This is the first resurrection" Revelation 20:5), and then "when the thousand years are expired" (Revelation 20:7), "the first resurrection" (wherein the saints live and reign with Christ over their enemies) must come to an end. And so for any interpretive system to continue "the first resurrection" into the period of "the little season" (Revelation 20:7-10) is at odds with what the text states.

2. I would also have you note the blessing that is pronounced on those who have a part in “the first resurrection”: “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power” (Revelation 20:6). Doesn’t it seem a little trivial to promise those who are already resurrected bodily, who have already entered into and are enjoying the fullness of everlasting life, I say to promise such glorified Christians a deliverance from the second death, which is hell (Revelation 21:8)? However, such a promise of deliverance from “the second death” (i.e. hell) holds out a wondrous hope and compelling motive to those who are yet in mortal bodies (not glorified bodies) and who are granted by Christ the grace to overcome (with a martyr’s spirit) the world, the flesh, and the devil by means of saving and persevering faith in Christ (Revelation 2:11; 1 John 5:5; Revelation 12:11).

3. Finally, from our text in Revelation 20:4-5, the Holy Spirit does not depict a general resurrection inclusive of all Christians (as the Premil interpretive system teaches). It is rather a resurrection of only martyrs that is in view here in Revelation 20 (as we have noted before). This limited resurrection of the martyrs is inconsistent with the all-inclusive language we find in other places of Scripture when referring to the general resurrection of the body of believers (John 5:28-29; John 6:40; 1 Corinthians 15:22-23, 51-52). 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. 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 this position of a bodily resurrection in Revelation 20 altogether.

C. Next, let us consider two considerable problems outside of our immediate text in considering “the first resurrection” to refer to a bodily resurrection upon earth (per the Premil position).

1. We find the most extensive discussion about the bodily resurrection of believers in 1 Corinthians 15 (again you may want to review sermon #12 in this series for more information). At the Second Coming of Christ when all of the dead in Christ shall be raised bodily from their graves, the Kingdom of Grace (in saving of all of God's elect throughout time) will be fully accomplished by Christ and that Kingdom of Grace will be delivered by Christ to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24). At that time, all of Christ's enemies (including the last enemy, death) will be forever vanquished and destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). Thus, once the resurrection of all the dead in Christ occurs, there can be no more sin, death, or any enemy left upon the earth, which means that there can be no bodily resurrection of all the dead in Christ before the millennium (in Revelation 20:4-6) because there is sin and death in the millennium (Isaiah 65:20), and there are wicked enemies who feign outward obedience to Christ and who come out of the millennium to be deceived and directed by Satan to attack the saints in Revelation 20:7-10. In other words, if as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:22-26, all enemies will be forever vanquished and destroyed at the resurrection of all the dead in Christ, how can there be a millennium that follows the resurrection that has sin, death, and enemies in it? The answer: There cannot be. Thus, "the first resurrection" revealed in Revelation 20:4-6 cannot be a bodily resurrection of all the dead in Christ who enter into the millennium.

2. Furthermore, when we turn to 1 Corinthians 15:50, we note concerning the resurrection of all the dead in Christ that Paul states, "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." Now let's think this through for a moment here. Since flesh and blood do in fact inherit the millennial kingdom because there is sin and death in it (Isaiah 65:20), and because there are certainly enemies who feign obedience to Christ during the millennium and who come out of the millennium as enemies to be deceived and misled by Satan (Revelation 20:7-9), what aspect of God's

Kingdom must be here in view when in 1 Corinthians 15:50 when it says that flesh and blood cannot inherit it? Paul must mean that flesh and blood (i.e. corruptible and perishable bodies) cannot inherit the Kingdom of Glory (i.e. the eternal state). And this is the kingdom that follows the resurrection of all the dead in Christ (according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:50-56), and not the millennial kingdom of the Premils. Dear ones, I submit this destroys the very foundation of the Premil position of “the first resurrection” in Revelation 20 as being the bodily resurrection of all the dead in Christ who then live and reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom. Thus, dear ones, there can be no Christians who are bodily resurrected and glorified who enter into a millennium that has sin and death in it; and the bodily resurrection of all the dead in Christ must come after the millennium (i.e. it must be a Postmillennial coming of Christ and a Postmillennial bodily resurrection of all the dead) after “the little season” of Satan’s release to deceive the nations, which bodily resurrection of all the dead I submit we find described in Revelation 20:11-15.

II. Why “the first resurrection” is not a spiritual resurrection or a regeneration of God’s elect who have passed from life into death.

A. I also want to affirm that I believe that there is a 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 in 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 regeneration of God’s elect.

B. Let us consider a couple problems with this view from the text itself.

1. This view (of some Postmils) has a similar problem to overcome as did the Premil position in regard to the period of time (a thousand years) in which the saints are said to live and reign with Christ over their enemies, which living and reigning with Christ is called “the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:4-5). For if “the first resurrection” and the living and reigning of saints with Christ over their enemies for a thousand years is the spiritual regeneration of God’s elect (as this position alleges), when the thousand years of “the first resurrection” end, do the saints who are regenerated cease to be regenerated when they no longer live and reign with Christ as Satan is released in order to deceive the nations in Revelation 20:7? For example, if one is regenerated in “the first resurrection” (according to this position) the day before the millennium ends, that spiritual living and reigning with Christ must come to an end the day that the millennium ends and Satan is released. This would be the logical conclusion to draw (though certainly not the conclusion that those holding the position would want to draw). For our text states that those who have a part in “the first resurrection” live and reign with Christ for a millennium of years (Revelation 20:4-6) during the same millennium of years in which Satan is bound (Revelation 20:1-3). And yet when the millennium of years has expired, “the first resurrection” and the reign of the saints must come to an end because Satan is released to deceive the nations once again. So how do saints that are regenerated in “the first resurrection” and who live and reign with Christ (according to this position) cease to be regenerated and cease to live and reign with Christ once the millennium has ended? I submit this is a serious interpretive (if not a serious theological) problem for this view.

2. This view of some Postmils also faces the problem of this being a martyr's resurrection (according to Revelation 20:4), rather than a resurrection of those who are dead in trespasses and sins and who come to life spiritually for the first time. Our text teaches that it is in some sense a resurrection of those who were slain and persecuted for the testimony of Christ that come to life (in other words, it is the resurrection of those who were already spiritually regenerated and were martyred for the Cause of Christ), rather than an initial spiritual resurrection of those from their hardness of heart who have hated Christ and His testimony. This is confirmed by the fact that the same "souls" of the martyrs (in Revelation 20:4-6) 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, according to Revelation 6:9-11 and Revelation 20:4-6, "the first resurrection" of these martyred Christians and their living and reigning with Christ is the RESULT AND EFFECT of their martyrdom and not the CAUSE of their martyrdom (as this view would unjustly impose upon the passage). Therefore, this serious objection brings down the foundation of this interpretation (of some Postmils), for it cannot be reconciled with the clear testimony of who is said in Revelation 6:9-11 and Revelation 20:4-6 to be raised in "the first resurrection" and who is said to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years: namely, the souls of those who hold fast the testimony of Christ even unto death.

C. Now I know I spent a lot of time in responding to these two interpretations (of Premils and some Postmils) to "the first resurrection", but I thought it was important to do so before continuing in our study of Revelation 20:7-10.

In conclusion, like the martyrs in heaven who plead for God to make right the injustice of the wicked against the righteous, so we who yet live upon the earth are likewise called to plead with the Lord in the same way while we yet live (according to the words of Christ in Luke 18:1-8) where we are encouraged to be persistent in pleading for God to reveal His glory in bringing judgment upon His enemies and vindicating His people who have labored under the oppression and attacks of enemies against them as they have faithfully stood for Christ and yet have been unjustly condemned. Dear ones, the faith of the righteous is revealed in not ceasing to pray for such a time in which the truth will be known and the injustice brought against the righteous will be revealed for what it is. Will you continue to persevere in faith and in the truth of Christ while here on the earth awaiting such a time of revelation? This perseverance and hope that the Lord will come and vindicate those who suffer for His righteousness and truth, dear ones, keeps us going even when we feel like giving up. The Lord has not abandoned you. The Lord has not forgotten you. He shall avenge and give judgment to those who stand for His cause in the time that He has appointed. Our duty is to plead with Him in the hope that all wrongs will be made right. But, dear ones, we must begin with ourselves and our own sins and our own wrongs and our own injustices. We must be sure that our prayer for vindication is not a seeking to simply exact a pound of flesh for the pound someone has brought against us. If we would rightly pray for God's vindication, it must be a vindication not of our own cause but a vindication of His own cause.

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