

Eye-Opener Studies



Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (Ps. 119:18)

13: The Myth of the Millennium

We are best going back to the mid-1940s as a starting point for this study on the Millennium Theory. The story by no means begins then, it has been around for centuries, but it gathered momentum and pace at that time, and since then the evangelical world of Christendom at least has been replete with its influence. Put very simply it was kick-started by the establishment of the state of Israel once more in the traditional Jewish homelands of Palestine, after the Second World War and the dreadful events of the Holocaust. So, in 1947-48 the Jews began to return to their biblical 'Promised Land' and many excited Christian scholars saw it as a beginning of events leading to the return of Christ and the end of the world. (We will examine the predicted happenings of that event in our next study.)

The fulness of the Gentiles

Turning to Romans, where Paul spends a good deal of time contrasting Gentile and Jewish responses to the Gospel. In chapter 11 we read: *'Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved...'* (Ro 11:25-26). This return to Palestine, and the re-establishment of the state of Israel, was then interpreted as the beginning of the end. It would not be too long before Jesus returned to Earth and all would bow the knee to Him. The 'fulness of the Gentiles' was obviously nearly over so the 'partial hardening' of the Jews, which made it very difficult for Christians down the 2000 years since Paul wrote this to convert them, was now over too and the Jews were on their way back to becoming once more God's chosen people. Thus, as Paul

wrote, 'all Israel will be saved', i.e. spiritual and physical. This is why there was renewed interest in these ideas. It seemed like we were beginning to live in the times of prophetic fulfilment, as our First-Century brethren found themselves too. The Millennium aspect of it all was a prophecy in Revelation 20 of a reign of a thousand years - a millennium - with Jesus as King. Fantastic! Wrong, but still excitingly fantastic, and we need to delve deeper.

It's a horrid world

Just try to come back to the mid-1940s. It's easier for me for I was born in October 1941, so I lived through it. We had just spent six horrible years 'hating' Germans, which had been a top-up after a twenty-year lull since 'hating' them once before. The crimes of the Nazis were, and still are, almost beyond belief and were very hard to come to terms with - not to excuse them but simply to believe that they could ever have happened. Then we spent the



Japanese P.O.W.s rescued by the Red Cross

last four of those years ‘hating’ the Japanese too. The atrocities they committed were also almost beyond belief as well. I once met a former Japanese P.O.W. some forty years after the War and he still hated them so much he would not buy a single thing which was made in Japan, and that was difficult in the 1980s when they seemed to have a monopoly on things like transistor radios and other electrical appliances. You could avoid their cars or motorcycles but their household goods were virtually ubiquitous.

Then there was the increasing Communist threat from Russia, and later China, plus severe rationing on the domestic front. There were wars and



Atom Bomb (Hiroshima)

rumours of wars; people grew almost paranoid about the possibility of a nuclear war with atom bombs raining down on us, and even worse, hydrogen bombs. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Lord would return, sort it all out, bring peace on Earth, punish the wicked with everything that they fully deserved, and we could bathe in His love? Yes, the world was ready for a touch of millennial peace and prosperity, at least for those who loved the Lord.

Just look at one of my favourite hymns from *The Christian Hymnary*, the hymnbook we used in my home congregation as I was growing up. It did not make it into *Favourite Hymns of the Church*. We would never have allowed it, but I loved it. It had one of the best tunes, ‘Glory Song’ (When all my labours and trials are o’er), and as a small lad even then I thought its sentiments were wonderful:

*Sing we the King who is coming to reign,
Glory to Jesus the Lamb that was slain,
Life and salvation His empire shall bring,
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King.*

Chorus

*Come let us sing: praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King:
This is our song, who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

*All men shall dwell in His marvellous light,
Races long severed His love shall unite,
Justice and truth from His sceptre shall spring,
Wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King.*

*All shall be well in His kingdom of peace,
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase,
Foe shall be friend when His triumph we sing,
Sword shall be sickle when Jesus is King.*

*Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin,
Doubt shall not darken His witness within,
Hell hath no terrors, and death hath no sting;
Love is victorious when Jesus is King.*

*Kingdom of Christ for thy coming we pray,
Hasten, O Father the dawn of the day
When this new song Thy creation shall sing,
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King.*

We will reference some of these notions as we go along, which is one reason why we printed the whole song. As you can see, I hope, it is a complete theological mess. The chorus has Jesus as our King but all the verses look forward to when He becomes our King. It is ‘when Jesus is King’, but He’s King now. He told His disciples that the Kingdom would come before many had died. ‘*And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.”*’ (Mk 9:1). Did Jesus get it wrong? Millennial Theory teaches that He did for He had to postpone the Kingdom! Yet Paul mentioned to Colossae, concerning the Father: ‘*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*’ (Col 1:13-14). So Christians have been transferred to a kingdom which has not yet come, according to Millennial Theory. We still await that day. Yet Paul told the saints in Corinth that when the Lord returns He will give the kingdom back to the Father. ‘*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in*

his own order: *Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* (1 Co 15:22-26 emphasis ours). Something is getting very mixed up here but many Christian believers like it because of the promise of the end of evil, the introduction of justice, peace, truth and love, when foes become friends as never before. They scan the papers and read of murder, evil empires such as North Korea, where one poor man was executed just for nodding off to sleep during a party rally; they hear of children being kitted out in suicide vests and made to walk through crowded areas until the bombs are detonated by remote control, and all in the name of Allah (which is not simply another name for 'Jehovah', the God of the Judaeo/Christian faiths!). And they want justice and judgement; and they know it may only ever come once the Saviour returns to claim His own at the end of time and finally deal with evil, so they look with eager expectation for that day, and thus they buy into some of the theories which supposedly deal with such eagerly anticipated times.

The thousand years

Let us turn directly to the notion of the thousand years and see what is actually said. It's in Revelation 20.

'Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

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 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. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is

the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth...' (Rev. 20:1-8).

What is the problem?

So, there it is: the promise of the saints reigning with Christ for a thousand years. Afterwards Satan will be locked up, then released for a short while. What's the problem?

Well, the first problem is that this is from the



Colosseum (Rome) - built most probably after Revelation was written!

Book of Revelation and that Book, above all, is full of symbolic, coded language and mystical signals sent to encourage the faithful in their hour of intense trial, mainly under oppression from Rome. It was designed to be very clear to the initiated and very unclear to the uninformed, mainly the Roman authorities, were they ever to try to delve into its depths. Almost all of the symbolic references are found in Old Testament Books and would be particularly relevant to Jewish Christians who knew their Bibles well. The message of the greater part of the whole Book is not intended, and never was, to be read purely at its literal face value. This passage in chapter 20 is no exception and is highly coded. Some of the most powerful codes are hidden in the numbers being employed, and Revelation is replete with mystery numbers. The two most famous are 666 (Rev. 13:18), and 144,000 (Rev. 7:4, 14:1, 3). 666 is the number of the beast and of a man and has

been identified down the years with just about every mega tyrant you care to name. The favourite is Nero, though the most likely is actually Rome itself - but that's a study in its own right. The 144,000 is used by Jehovah's Witnesses in their door-knocking ministry as a literal number of the truly saved elite, and to impress and bamboozle the gullible. A quick look at it will reveal that the tribe of Dan does not figure there, whilst Joseph gets two entries in it via his son Manasseh and himself, but not poor old Ephraim, and there are no women numbered in it either, nor married men because they are all male virgins (14:3)! So much for literalizing carelessly. They operate on the notion of never letting the facts get in the way of a good story!

Secondly, those who love to trawl through the Book and erect fanciful theories, frequently political in nature, drawn out from the symbols and applied to our day in particular, usually fail to read and note the very first line of the Book. This sets the scene and explains the Book. It is not coded or difficult to understand, and if remembered correctly would cut off many an idle speculation about its later symbolic contents. *'The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.'* (Rev. 1:1, emphasis added). This tells us that what follows is not designed for thousands of years hence but for the times in which it was written. These things, whatever they may be, are coming 'soon'. The message was for their day and times, to strengthen them. If you were to face lions in an arena because of your faith in Christ, maybe a special message of encouragement from the Lord Himself would help give you the courage to believe and endure, and face a horrid death.

Looking at Revelation 20

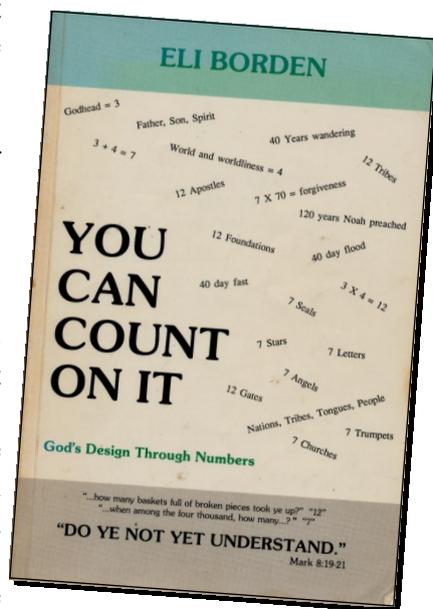
We cannot do a study of the Book of Revelation here. It is a complex topic which delves deeply into Old Testament Books such as Daniel and Ezekiel too. Conclusions and interpretations frequently depend on when the teacher believes Revelation was written, and that is debatable. We believe for these studies that the Book was written in the mid-to-late 60s before the Destruction of Jerusalem and the

demolition of the temple. There is no hint therein that the temple had been destroyed and was no longer extant. (We also believe that John's Gospel pre-dates 70 AD.) It is easy to accept the historical, non-biblical account of the apostle John surviving to a ripe old age into the 90s AD but the same records say he was old and feeble at the end. His extant writings in the Bible are not the product of an old, tired mind but of vigour in its prime. Having pointed at the Jehovah's Witnesses above, some may care to ponder that Mormons believe John is still alive today based on the supposed 'prophecy' in John 21:20-23. Even John himself didn't believe that one! Beware of handling prophecies especially highly symbolical ones.

In trying to understand the messages of prophecies in Revelation it is frequently easier to say that a particular interpretation is wrong rather than being able to explain what actually is right. We noted this situation when struggling to understand the Nature of God and the Trinity, and handle the Incarnation of Jesus.

So for this study we are having to look at what Revelation 20:1-8 is not saying, rather than what it is, for it is what Millennial Theory says it is saying which clearly is wrong.

There is a wonderful book by a brother Eli Borden, written in 1988 and published by Star Bible Publications, Box 181220, Fort Worth, Texas 76118, called *You can count on it, (God's design through numbers)*. He shows just what various numbers indicate in the Bible and even the newest Christian believer can see that certain numbers are significant, like 1, 3, 7, 10, 12, 40, 1000 and so on. The whole Bible can be reduced to a series of numbers because both Greek and Hebrew letters have a numerical value. God is the inventor of numbers and 'speaks' to us through them at times. This book is a treasure trove for the interested student and I was able to purchase a copy for my son in 2016 through AbeBooks.co.uk (I think they also have a '.co.us' as well) for around £10. It's not a book that is carried as a stock item but one of a new generation of books which, if ordered, are printed specially for you, so can take about a fortnight to arrive. Get one! That's



an order! (Sorry, my copy in the photograph is somewhat dog-eared, but then it has been very well used.)

One of the principles of interpreting numbers in the Bible is that a doubling, or even a trebling, gives it even greater significance. 1000 is 10 x 10 x 10 and 10 is a symbol of totality. Do a word association test with any Bible student and say, 'Ten,' and back will come the word 'Commandments'. Thus 10 cubed is the most powerful way of saying total, complete, absolute, forever. It does not mean a literal number. Deuteronomy 7:9 tells us that God is faithful and loving to a thousand generations. This does not mean that those of the thousand-and-first generation need to watch out because, hard luck, there's nothing down for them. So too in Psalm 50:10 all the cattle belong to God on a thousand hills, but it's a shame about those on hill 1001.

Revelation 20 does not say anything about how long Jesus will reign but that Christians will reign with Him for a thousand years - or some Christians will. Jesus is to reign for ever, as was pointed out earlier in the Book. *'Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."'* (Rev 11:15). Coming to the climax of the Book speaking of the new Jerusalem, where Christians will live, we read: *'And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.'* (Rev. 22:5). The reign of Christ is forever. The reign of Christians is forever. 'Forever' is the literal word and a 'thousand years' is the figurative.

Those who wish to literalise the Millennium and present it as a one-thousand-year reign must literalise the whole passage. They cannot cherry-pick a bit here and another bit there. Again, just focusing on chapter 20:1-8 we find a 'bottomless pit'. Where was it dug? How can it be bottomless? That may sound trite and silly, but continuing down it does not say that 'all Christians will reign with Christ for a thousand years'. Those who will have this privilege are clearly those who had been beheaded for Christ and who had not had the mark of



Modern beheadings: ISIS beheads Coptic Christian believers 2014

the beast on their foreheads. The rest are not a part of this prophecy. Since most Christians do not die by being beheaded, though some even today do occasionally suffer such a fate (see picture above), most are not to be a part of this select band. It is not a promise of a literal, wonderful, millennial joy for all Christians but, of course, is a promise of eternal life for those who endure such sacrificial hardships for their faith. This one-thousand-year literal reign is simply not being taught. It is the Myth of the Millennium.

Is it serious?

The question could rightly be asked: 'Does it matter?' After all what actually happens when Jesus returns is largely immaterial; we just have to ensure that we are on His side and will be numbered in with the righteous, for there will be no second chances once He appears again. There is no denying that this question makes a valid point, if things could just be left there like that. Unfortunately there is a good deal of false teaching surrounding these theories and Christians are to be armed and ready to make a defence of what they believe (cf. 1 Pt. 3:15) - verbally and intellectually, of course, not physically and violently. You see, these ideas permeate the thinking of Non-conformist, evangelical circles and many in our communion see very little difference between such groups and ourselves. If they lose access to a brotherhood congregation they are happy enough to join in 'something very similar to us'. By this they mean that these people practice believers' baptism by immersion, not realizing that there can be serious differences at rock bottom. The greatest is not simply about baptism, which, as we've just said, they normally practice, but their answer to the question: 'What must I do to be saved?' We have mentioned this in earlier studies. Baptism, whatever

its purpose in their minds, plays no part at all in the saving process as we respond biblically to the call of Christ, because they view it as a ‘works’. Baptism is definitely not a work which we do in order to obtain salvation. We can be baptized (immersed) a million times and simply get wet. It is a response in faith to the belief we have that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God (cf. Acts 8:37) and we submit to it by symbolically identifying with His death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-11). We were ‘baptized into Christ’ (Rom. 6:3). This is the only way the Bible ever mentions as to how we got into Christ (see also Gal. 3:27). It therefore seems reasonable to link it with salvation, especially as Jesus commanded His apostles to go out and baptize converts in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19). Wrong teaching on Millennial Theory may seem to be not too serious but wrong soteriology (doctrine of salvation) most certainly is. It sells a would-be convert short at precisely the point he/she needs it to be the most accurate.

Digging a little deeper

Many Christians don’t dig too deeply into this subject, possibly being put off by the impressively daunting ‘Manchester’ word* it hides behind, ‘premillennialism’.

One look at a word like that and they think, “Scriptural eggheads can handle this. I’ll leave it alone.” The best book I ever read on the subject is *God’s Prophetic Word* by Foy E. Wallace Jr. It is a transcript of a whole series of very hard-hitting lectures he gave on the subject and he certainly did not pull his punches. Mind you, he was famous for such lectures and was a fervent advocate



Foy E. Wallace Jr.

* A ‘Manchester word’ is an amusing way of describing a word you don’t recognize, especially when reading aloud. When you come to it, just say, ‘Manchester’, and pass over it, is the idea. Why ‘Manchester’ was selected for this honour, I have no idea; just don’t send me to Coventry for using it!



for the sole use of the King James Version (Authorized Version) as ‘God’s own version’, and no other (and it’s not just bro. Foy who thought/ thinks that - see picture above!). *God’s Prophetic Word* is now out of print but if you can find a copy, please obtain it and read it. It will not bore you - and you’ll learn a lot from it.

Brief excursion into premillennialism

Foy’s book is a thick tome and the subject it covers is not easy to summarize. The thousand-year reign of Christ when He appears at the end of time is one of the key elements in the theory. In order to sustain such a view it has to be maintained that Jesus is not reigning fully now and that the Kingdom He came to proclaim and establish did not happen as planned but had to be postponed, ‘put on ice’ as it were, until His return. As mentioned earlier when we quoted the hymn, it is ‘Sing we the King who **is coming** to reign’, not ‘who is reigning already’. Yet Jesus came preaching that the Kingdom was at hand and sent His disciples out with that very message. Moving from Nazareth to Capernaum at the time of John the Baptist’s death, He began to preach this message (Mt. 4:17). Later He sent out the Twelve with the same message: *‘These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay....”’* (Mt 10:5-8). We have noted earlier that He predicted, “... I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with

power,”” (Mk 9:1), so He either got it massively wrong or the notion that the Kingdom was thwarted and had to be postponed is what is wrong. We also noted a ‘mistake’ by Paul who told the Colossian brethren that *‘He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.’* (Col 1:13-14), if we have to wait until the Lord returns for this to happen because He is not King in His Kingdom at the moment.

It is also what is said about the church which raises eyebrows and denies the clear teaching of the New Testament. In order to ‘postpone’ the Kingdom until Christ returns the suggestion is made that the Cross was an unfortunate and dreadful mistake. Jesus actually did come to establish His Kingdom on Earth, centred on Jerusalem and the temple, but events overtook Him rather more rapidly than expected and the church was cobbled together as an interim measure until He comes again to complete, and finish properly, what He failed to accomplish first time around. Now we are really entering heretical territory, and Foy Wallace is not slow to point this out. The premillennial theory is the old Jewish heresy in a slightly different wrapper, he maintained. At rock bottom, he’s right!

The church is not a hastily cobbled together Divine afterthought. Paul tells the Ephesians: *‘Of this gospel I was made a minister ...to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized*

in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.’ (Eph. 3:7-13, emphasis ours). So the church was according to the ‘eternal purpose’ of God, not a rush-job. And, of course, there are many statements that Jesus came to die for our salvation, as Peter told the Jews at Pentecost: *“‘Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”*” (Acts 2:22-23, emphasis ours). In Revelation itself we read of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world: *‘All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.’* (Rev 13:8, NKJV). Yes, from prophetic Psalms like Psalm 22, to magnificent pictures of the suffering ‘man of sorrows’ in Isaiah 53, the Cross was a positive part of the eternal plan of salvation, and no manipulation of misunderstood texts to suit a mistaken theory can disguise this fact.

Conclusion

We are going to continue further along these themes in our next study: ‘The End of the World’ (no. 14). Suffice it to say that people get excited looking forward to Christ’s return when good will finally overcome evil. There truly is so much wickedness in the world, and so many wicked people seem to get away almost scot-free at times. The Psalmist thought the same in his day too. Nothing much changes, as Solomon noted in Ecclesiastes. We want it to be something like this so we do not always recognize the underlying errors behind these teachings. It’s high time that we did!

Tasks

Using a concordance, examine carefully the concept of the Kingdom preached by our First Century brethren as found in Acts to Revelation.