



Conducted by
James Gardiner

THE MILLENNIUM: II

LAST month I tried to show from the New Testament books (*other than* the Revelation) that any construction placed upon the Revelation (especially with reference to the commonly held belief concerning the “thousand years reign”) could not be a literal one, and that at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ no room or place for such a reign could be found.

In this article perhaps a few thoughts on the book of Revelation itself would be helpful to our questioner. I make no pretence at understanding much of this book, and can but hope to provoke some points which each individual can pursue himself or herself.

What The Revelation Does Not Teach

Revelation 20:4 says that John saw “. . . . thrones, and they sat upon them and judgement 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.” From this verse many feel justified in saying that Jesus will return to this earth and begin a reign over all nations

for one thousand years' duration. I know of no verse in the New Testament which says that, when Jesus comes again, He will ever set foot upon the earth, much less reign upon the earth. Jesus is reigning *now*, and has been for some two thousand years, and will continue to reign *until* all His enemies shall have been destroyed. The last enemy to be destroyed will be death, and death will be destroyed when Jesus returns, when death and hell shall be cast into the lake of fire.

Neither do the relevant verses in Rev. 20 mention anything about a "reign of Christ." Christ will not reign sometime in the future, *i.e.* when He comes again, but *has been* reigning, *is now* reigning and *will reign* until He comes again; *then* He shall cease from reigning. The verse quoted *does* say, however, that *certain* individuals will reign, and will reign with Christ, and these individuals were to be confined to "those beheaded for the witness of Jesus and who had not worshipped the beast." *They*—those certain souls—no more and no less a number—were not only to *reign* with Christ but to *live* with Him, for this certain period of time; in a special sense and in a particular way.

The Revelation Fulfilled

When we consider all the profound and momentous events which will accompany the second and final coming of Jesus, and which will take place simultaneously with His coming "in the wink of an eye," one realises that the predictions of John in the Revelation will not come to pass then, and therefore must have already come to pass. Indeed it is very doubtful if any of the Revelation has a future application. The book has, most likely, all now come to pass. It was addressed in general to all those Christians in the early days of the church who were about to undergo dreadful persecution, and in particular to the seven churches in Asia.

The book seems to have been written as a warning of things to come and also a comfort and encouragement when these things did come to pass. The liberal use of symbols and figurative language gives *us* much difficulty in understanding it *now*; but those to whom it was addressed were no doubt more able to understand and interpret the imagery. It is said that the signs and symbols were used in order to cloud the meaning of the book to those for whom it was not intended, *i.e.* the enemies of the gospel, and thereby acted in the sense that a letter in code would do today. In like manner Jesus, at one time, spoke in parables to the people but gave the interpretation thereof privately to His disciples. Certain phrases seem to confirm this outlook on the book and the fact that the fulfilment of the prophetic content of the book would not be long delayed, but would come to pass even in the lifetime of some then living: for example "Hold fast that which thou hast till I come." If this was intended to be a comfort to Christians living under persecution nearly two thousand years ago (and it was) then clearly it could not be referring to His *second* coming, but referred to His coming to them in some special way and making His presence felt in comforting them in their trials. The imagery of the book certainly seems to portend trials and tribulation—the beasts; famines; pouring out of the vials; scourges, pestilences and many other disasters—all seemingly indicative of imprisonment, torture and death itself in store for Christ's followers.

Assurance of Victory

In the sixth chapter; we have the vision of the "souls under the altar"—the souls of those beheaded for the testimony of God—an abject picture of apparent defeat. The scenes and symbols continue until this twentieth chapter where we see again the souls of those beheaded for the testimony of God—but this time in glory and victory and sitting upon thrones (this being described as a resurrection or vindication of their cause). There follows in the closing chapters of the book, the glorious eventual and ultimate victory of the church, emerging from those dark days of persecution and entering upon a more peaceful time. John's closing words again indicate the immediacy of the events foretold in the book, "He that testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly, Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus." Jesus promises to John and his contemporaries that He would "come" soon and give succour to them in the distressing times ahead, outlined in the book.

It would appear, then, that the prophecies of the Revelation were "shortly" to come to pass and for reasons best known at that time were "signified" to the early Christians in mysticism—a mighty contrast to the simple clarity of the other books of the New Testament, where the essential truths of salvation are expounded in such plain and open language. Nothing that God wants *us* to know *today* is clouded in symbolical or mystical terminology, and this fact alone, I think, tends to confirm the belief that Revelation had application and fulfilment in the early days of the church.

Literal or Figurative ?

The term "a thousand years" is the longest period of time referred to in the book. There are six references to it in the twentieth chapter and it occurs nowhere else. Three of the references refer to the time the devil is bound, and three to the time of the reigning of the saints. If all other numbers in the book had a *strictly literal* application, then the thousand years should doubtless be construed likewise; but since none of the others is held to a strictly literal application, why should the thousand years be ? Were there literally 200,000,000 galloping horsemen, no more and no less ? Did a literal stream of human blood, horse-bridle deep, actually run for 200 miles (and actually flow from the grapes in a winepress) ? Were exactly seven thousand, not one more or one less, slain in the earthquake ? Very little in the book is to be taken literally, and we ask upon what basis we should assume that the "thousand years" is to be regarded as a thousand literal years of time. The great millennial theory has been built up around the mention of a thousand years: but surely there is good reason for doubting that a thousand years, or any other specific period of time, was intended at all. When we think of a bottomless pit, of a great chain, of binding Satan with the chain, of casting the bound Satan into this bottomless pit, we surely must realize that all of that is a figurative treatment of the prophetic facts being announced. Satan is in the bottomless pit for a thousand years. Do we really think this refers to a thousand literal years ?

I suggest then that Rev. 20 says nothing at all about a millennial reign of Christ at His coming. The verse 4 (" . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years ") says nothing about Christ's second coming, nor is it mentioned; nor does it mention a bodily resurrection of everyone; nor does it mention a reign on earth; nor does it mention any geographical location such as Jerusalem; nor does it mention David's throne. *Certain souls*, disembodied spirits, were to reign and live with Jesus for a period of time, in very special circumstances and in a very particular sense, and perhaps the fact that disembodied spirits are involved would rule out the earth as a venue for the reign.