

Why One Thousand Years?

By Jane Titrud

The most straightforward interpretation of Revelation 20:1-4 is that Jesus Christ will rule and reign with His saints for a thousand years after the Great Tribulation Period has ended. This interpretation fits the natural flow of Revelation chapter 19 into chapter 20.

Revelation 19 describes One who would appear to be Jesus Christ coming back on a white horse (vv. 11-13, 15, 16) along with the armies from heaven who are “*clothed in fine linen, white and clean*” (v. 14). These armies are more than likely the saints of God who were raptured just prior to the Great Tribulation and are now returning with Christ to take care of the situation on earth. The beast and the kings of the earth have assembled their armies to make war against Christ and the armies that are with Him (v. 19). However, the beast and the false prophet are seized and thrown into the lake of fire (v. 20). The rest are then killed and eaten by birds (v. 21).

After this, in chapter 20, John sees an angel coming down from heaven with a great chain and a key to the abyss in order to bind Satan for a thousand years (vv. 1-3). He also sees thrones and people sitting on them for the purpose of rendering judgment—also for a thousand years (v. 4). The armies of heaven who come back with Christ (19:14) will likely be the ones who will administer judgment at this time, along with Christ, of course, and the saints who will come out of the Tribulation period (20:4). The ones being judged, on the other hand, must be those who were born on earth after the rapture of the Church but were not part of the armies assembled against Christ at His Second Coming, as these were killed in the great slaughter of Revelation 19, verses 17, 18, and 21. Of course, those being judged would also include any and all natural peoples born during the Millennial Reign.

Yet, one might well ask, why one thousand years? Why not immediately create the new heavens and the new earth mentioned in Revelation 21: 1, and then have Jesus Christ and His saints rule on earth forever? One thousand years is a long time, but it is not forever.

One reason the saints will rule with Christ during His Millennial reign is to fulfill promises made to the early disciples as well as to the rest of His saints to the effect that they would someday rule and reign with Him in His coming kingdom (Matthew 19:28; 2 Timothy 2:12a). But this really does not answer the question of why such promises were made in the first place or why the thousand years.

I believe the thousand-year period has to do with God teaching mankind as well as the angels in heaven something about the fallen nature of man by means of an object lesson. Several times in the Scriptures one can see God choosing to deal with mankind over extended periods of time in order to *demonstrate* a truth rather than just *stating* it outright, and that would seem to be the case here.

Consider, for example, that after the Fall of mankind, God let more than 1600 years pass before sending the Flood of Noah. God made a promise way back at the time of the Fall that the “seed of the woman” would be coming to defeat Satan and deliver mankind from evil. This promised “seed” would bruise Satan’s head while Satan would bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15). But, obviously, this “seed” did not come right away. Instead, God allowed man to multiply for several generations until “*the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and...every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” (Genesis 6:5, NASB).

The wickedness that took place during this time period was no doubt influenced by Satan. The Bible tells us, for example, that Cain “*was of the evil one, and slew his brother*” (1 John 3:12a). But the increase of evil at this time served to reveal something about the nature of man’s fallen heart as well. That is, if man were left to himself, he would eventually destroy himself. Some such as Seth (Genesis 4:26) and Enoch (5:22-24) walked with God, but most did not. Instead, by the time of Noah, evil was rampant.

It was not that the people who lived during this time period had been left without a credible witness concerning the evils of sin. Adam lived a long time—some 930 years, which was well into the lifetime of Noah’s father, and Adam was certainly familiar with sin and the deceiving powers of Satan. Perhaps he

ultimately surrendered to the influence of evil himself. The Bible does not really say. But one thing is for certain—man would either succumb to his own violence or perish from God’s wrath. Indeed, God did decide to deal with the situation at hand by sending a worldwide flood from which only eight persons survived and then only by His grace.

It was only a few hundred years more before man got himself in trouble again by organizing around the leadership of Nimrod (Genesis 10:8–10; 11:1–9). Instead of multiplying and filling the earth as God had directed Noah and his sons (Genesis 9:1, 7), the people decided to resist God’s direction in favor of making a name for themselves. They would attempt to do this by building a tower that would “*reach to heaven*” (Genesis 11:4). This was likely for the purpose of worshipping the heavens. Once again, the people were not left without a witness against this wickedness. Noah was still around to testify about God’s Word and His willingness to judge evil. He lived some 350 years after the Flood. Yet, men were eager to exalt themselves and resist God’s will. Hence, God had to intervene once more. Only this time He did so by confusing their one common language (Genesis 11:7) and scattering them over the face of the earth (Genesis 11:9).

The lesson here was that corporate government can be corrupted by man’s sinful nature just as well as individuals. It does not have to take thousands of years either. If a leader happens to be a godly man, then government tends to promote man’s common good as well as God’s purposes. However, when a leader is ruled by evil, it can lead to corruption and wickedness on a grand scale. And, just like Satan, fallen man loves power.

Scattering the people abroad according to their different languages served to limit the influence of any one leader. A reduced lifespan helped to somewhat limit man’s potential for power as well, for people did not live as long after the Flood as they did before the Flood (see Genesis 6:3). God also worked through men by choosing Abraham and his descendants to point the way to Christ—the promised “*seed of the woman*” (Genesis 3:15) who would destroy the works of the evil one. It would still be several hundreds of years before the coming of Christ. However, God made promises to Abraham about his descendants when he was old and had no children as of yet (Genesis 12:1–3, 7; 15:4, 5). And, the fact that Abraham believed God and God credited this to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6) pointed the way to the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith.

But God also told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved and oppressed in a foreign land for four hundred years (Genesis 15:13). This would be a long time to have to endure slavery. Yet, it happened to the people of Israel. The reason was partly because the land that was promised to Abraham and his descendants was still occupied by others, whose iniquity was “*not yet complete*,” as God said in Genesis 15:16. Therefore, the Israelites had to wait for their deliverance. Yet, I believe there was another reason for the delay as well. That is, the Israelites needed to see that slavery was bad—really bad. Otherwise, they would likely not have wanted to leave Egypt at all. For even after coming to the point of crying out for deliverance and seeing God redeem them with great signs and wonders, many still wanted to return. They quickly forgot how bitter their bondage had been under Pharaoh and lost the awe and wonder of the miracles they had just experienced through God’s almighty power. Something similar can happen in the case of human bondage to sin as well, which is kind of the point.

Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was a real historic event. But it was also symbolic in that it pointed ahead to the salvation and deliverance that Christ would eventually achieve for us on the cross. In other words, Christ delivered us from the power of sin and its bondage. Yet Christians sometimes forget what a bondage sin is and allow it back into their lives.

After the exodus from Egypt, God then dealt with the nation of Israel for a period of about 1400 years prior to the advent of Christ. And, one of the first and most important things He did during this time period was to give Israel the Law of Moses. This Law consisted of moral commandments as well as various statutes and ordinances, which were given in order to communicate the righteous requirements of a Holy God to those who were called to be His people. The Israelites were thus expected to practice it. In order to encourage obedience, moreover, God gave the people judges and priests, set up earthly kings, and

sent them prophets. These religious leaders were altogether called to help keep the people on track and to point them back to God's Word should they stumble—but seemingly to no avail. Eventually, almost everyone, including these spiritual leaders, was corrupted by sin. Many Israelites simply grew tired of the sacrificial system of approaching the one true God and ended up serving Him by rote. Others abandoned their allegiance to Him altogether in favor of serving gods made of wood or stone. The result was that the entire nation was eventually led away into captivity. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed as well.

Yet, however bad this situation turned out for Israel, giving the people His Law served a very significant purpose. That is, it demonstrated first hand that mankind needs more than a human king and a list of rules and regulations in order to defeat the power of sin. Even the righteous commandments of God written in stone were not enough. Ultimately, hearts need to be changed, which is something the Law cannot do. This, in turn, pointed to the need for a righteous Savior. The Law thus prepared the way for at least some Jews to accept the Gospel. Acting like a tutor, it led them to Christ that they might be saved by faith instead of being condemned by the Law (Galatians 3:23–25).

Many if not most Jews who were alive at the time of Christ were deceived into thinking that they were somehow saved by keeping the Law and, consequently, missed the way of salvation (Romans 9:30–33). Most practicing Jews are yet deceived along these lines. But this situation serves to show that fallen man still has a religious spirit that wants to achieve some degree of righteousness. It is just that he wants to achieve it on his own terms and merits rather than submitting to the Gospel of God's grace (see Romans 10:2–4).

In this present age of grace known as the “Gospel Age” or the “Church Age,” we have our own struggles as well. That is, we are likewise experiencing a long period of delay with respect to God's dealings with mankind. Time and again we have seen that long periods of time involving *apparent* inactivity on God's part tends to bring out the fleshly side of man. The current situation involves the fact that we are still waiting for the return of Christ. It has been more than two thousand years since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and His delay in coming back is having an effect upon the Church as well as the world. Much of the world is simply tired of hearing about the Gospel. Most do not have a saving faith in Christ at all, let alone believe that He is coming back. Yet, Christians are in need of endurance as well. An increasing number of those who call themselves “Christians” are actively becoming involved in the ways of the world and bringing worldly wisdom into the Church. Some of these may not actually be saved. Yet another possibility is that some have become deceived. Deception has been a problem for the Church from the beginning and so it will be in the end times. Even Paul exhorted Timothy to be on guard against it: *“O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’—which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith”* (1 Timothy 6:20, 21).

The truth is that the current conditions are not at all static. Satan is actively involved in deceiving and discouraging Believers as well as in stealing souls away from the Gospel. He pushes falsehood in the name of “science.” He appeals to the flesh and readily uses the media to endorse all sorts of debauchery until people become desensitized to it. He is also pushing for tolerance of sin while at the same time he is preparing people politically to accept the idea of a one-world government. All of this will eventually lead to the rise of the antichrist and the installation of his temporary kingdom. In other words, most people will reject the Gospel.

Indeed, the world seems like it is hastening towards the rule of the antichrist. But Revelation 19 also shows us that the kingdom of the antichrist will be put down by the return of Christ who will then rule and reign on earth with His redeemed saints for a thousand years. This, in turn, brings us back to the original question: Why one thousand years? The answer is that this time period will be necessary in order to test the hearts of the natural people who will be living under the Millennial Reign of Christ. It will also serve to show that man cannot ultimately blame Satan for his rebellion against God. Yes, Satan has cleverly enticed men all throughout human history in order to promote his lies that lead to destruction and damnation. Satan wants to destroy God's creation and present himself as king. But all he has ever been

able to do is appeal to sinful hearts that are only too willing to be deceived—even in the Gospel age. And what happens after the Millennial Reign will show that human hearts can still be prideful and rebellious without the influence of Satan and his temptations as well.

The Millennial Reign will usher in a time of righteousness, peace, and goodness unlike anything humanity has ever known on earth before—at least not since the Fall of Adam. Just think, with Satan locked away, the temptation to sin will be greatly reduced. Man will not be able to challenge the existence of God, for Christ the Creator will be living in their midst. Plus, violence will be nonexistent. It will simply not be tolerated. Yet, what we find at the end of the thousand years when Satan is released from his confinement is that he will be able to *quickly* deceive the nations once more and will try to overthrow the kingdom of Christ (Revelation 20:7–9).

Satan will only be released for a short time at the end of the thousand years (Revelation 20:3). And yet Revelation 20:8 compares the number of his followers to “*the sand of the seashore.*” This shows that most if not all of the natural peoples who will live on earth during this time period will fail to ever receive Christ into their hearts by faith. The presence of Christ and His righteous rule will seemingly make no difference. Perhaps people will be forced to comply with the will of the Lord during the Millennial Reign but will secretly resent it. Or, maybe the ease of life and relative absence of temptation during this time period will deceive many into thinking that they are somehow above sin, which will not be the case. As children of Adam, they will still have fleshly hearts that need to be changed. And, lacking humility as well as the guidance of truth, they might thus become easy targets for Satan’s lies once he is released again to deceive and tempt them. Whatever the case, God will bring a hasty end to their rebellion and consume them with fire (Revelation 20:9).

The thousand years will thus answer every argument to the effect that “the devil made me do it.” The lesson here is that man’s problem is ultimately his own spiritual wickedness and not just Satan’s power. God will consequently be forever justified in the eyes of man and the angels in what He is about to do—that is, condemn the wicked from every generation of men—just as He will condemn Satan—to the lake of fire forever (Revelation 20:10, 15). Notice that the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11–15 immediately follows the Millennial Reign of Christ after it ends in rebellion. I believe this is the reason why. God will use this time period to finally prove His point about the fundamental nature of the human heart—namely: “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings*” (Jeremiah 17:9, 10, KJV).

Another thing we can take away from this situation is that godly government is not the answer to man’s sin problem. What could be godlier than a government in which Christ is king? The Millennial Reign will stand in stark contrast to the kingdom of the antichrist in that regard, yet look how it ends. The one and only answer to man’s sin problem is the Gospel.

Understanding that eternal, final judgment will someday be leveled against all human wickedness not covered by the blood of Christ may be a sobering reality. But the good news is that no one alive today *has* to come to this end. In this present age of grace, God has given us the Gospel as His powerful remedy to judgment. As the Apostle Paul said, “***For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written, BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH***” (Romans 1:16, 17, NASB, bold emphasis added). So, let us be encouraged to seize every opportunity to be faithful witnesses unto God’s gracious truth by giving the message of the Gospel freely to those in need. Amen.