

Discrete Millennialism

by Douglas E. Cox

Authors who write about the thousand years of Revelation 20 generally list three different ways that this is understood by scholars: Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism. So, how should we understand the thousand years? Are these the only options? Here, I will discuss another explanation, one which I call *discrete millennialism*.

Peter said, "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." [2 Peter 3:8] The saints are "the children of light" and "children of the day," not of the night, or darkness. [1 Thessalonians 5:5]

David wrote:

Psalm 90:4

For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

The saints may also be called the "*children of the thousand years*;" as with God one day is as a thousand years. Their Christian lives are the time of their reign with Christ. David said,

Psalm 84:10

For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

John said that the saints are "priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." [Revelation 20:6] The thousand years is a *label* that John attaches to the spiritual lives of

believers. This suggests that each of their lives is a *discrete Millennium*, a time that is unique, and *personal*, and *individual*.

John did not say that Jesus reigns for a thousand years; it applies to the saints who reign with him. The reign of Jesus is to last forever.

On the one hand, the book of Revelation describes Jesus as a lamb, who stands on mount Zion with 144,000 saints who "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth;" on the other hand, he is portrayed as ruling the nations with a rod of iron, and "treading the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" as the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

These are contrasting images, but both are valid throughout the present age. Similarly, the saints are portrayed in the prophetic Scriptures as sheep. In Ezekiel 34:6, God's sheep wander through all the mountains, and are scattered upon all the face of the earth. They are preyed upon by shepherds who rule over them with cruelty. [vs. 4] God says he will seek his sheep, and he will deliver them from those shepherds, [vs. 10] and bring them to the mountains of Israel, where they will feed by the rivers; [vs. 13] David will be their prince, and their shepherd. [vs. 23-24] In John 10:11, Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

The prophet Zechariah depicts Christ as the shepherd, and the saints as sheep, in Zechariah 13:7. This prophecy is cited in Matthew 26:31 and in Mark 14:27. The verses following say, "And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God."

In the introductory verses of Revelation, John describes the saints of the present age as kings and priests unto God. [Revelation 1:6] The four beasts and 24 elders, who represent those who are redeemed by Christ's blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, sing a new song which says that God has "made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." [Revelation 5:10]

In Revelation 12:1, the woman in heaven is adorned with a crown of twelve stars. These stars are often supposed to represent the twelve apostles. All believers who are in Christ reign with Him as kings and priests.

In the Old Testament, the kings of Israel and Judah were anointed. Believers are also anointed. Paul said, "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God." [2 Corinthians 1:21] He said believers have been sealed with the spirit of promise. [Ephesians 1:13; Revelation 7:2-4]

Kings of Judah and Israel ruled over the territory of the promised land. In the New Testament, the promised land is a *shadow* and a *type* of a "better country," a heavenly one, which represents the spiritual things promised to the saints. [Hebrews 11:16]

Kings of Judah and Israel often had to defend their territory against aggression by foreign invaders; similarly, believers may be involved in spiritual warfare; the truth of the Gospel, and faith in God's promises, is the spiritual territory they defend. [Ephesians 6:12]

The kings of Judah were descendants of David, and James identified the *Church* with the tabernacle of David. [Acts 15:16]

The apostle Peter said the saints are a "royal priesthood." [1 Peter 2:9-10]

The locusts in Revelation 9:7 wear "crowns like gold," evidently alluding to their status as believers.

These Scriptures connecting the saints to *royalty* and reigning as *kings and priests* are consistent with John's statement in Revelation 20, that those saints who are figuratively "beheaded" reign with Christ for 1,000 years, where *beheaded* is understood as a figure and symbolic of submission to God, similar to the rite of circumcision. The individual, *discrete millennial* reigns of the saints sometimes ends prematurely. Zechariah said two thirds of the flock would be "cut off and die" and a third would be left, who would be refined as silver or gold.

In Revelation 12:4, a third of the stars are cast to the earth; they are drawn by the tail of the dragon, who has seven heads and ten horns, who is identified in verse 9 as Satan. This corresponds to their thousand-year reigns ending, referred to in Revelation 20:8-9. They turn aside from the faith, and are deceived, and compass the camp of the saints about.

Revelation 20:7-9

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

The fiery judgment is likely what Paul described in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

There are some believers mentioned in the New Testament, for whom the *thousand years* of their reign with Christ, and their *discrete Millennium* ended prematurely.

In the early days of the Church, Ananias and Sapphira his wife tried to deceive the apostles, claiming they gave all the money they had received for a piece of land, when in fact they kept back some of it for themselves. Peter perceived that they were lying; "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath *Satan* filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" Both of them were struck dead.

Paul wrote in his first epistle to Timothy,

1 Timothy 1:5-7

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

Also, referring to unmarried women, he said: "For some are already turned aside after Satan." [1 Timothy 5:15]

In Revelation 20, the thousand years end when people turn aside, and no longer reign with Christ. For them, Satan is no longer bound, but he is loosed from his prison, and they become deceived, and they go forth to battle against the *camp of the saints*. Upon them the fiery wrath of God descends.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians who were suffering persecution:

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

Those who are *beheaded* are those who follow Christ. For them, Satan has been bound in a bottomless pit. I suggest, *beheaded* has nothing to do with how their lives end, but it is a metaphor, depicting saints who submit to Christ and to his word.