

PREMILLENNIALISM: REVELATION 20, REIGNING WITH CHRIST

According to Revelation 20:4, John told his readers he saw those who had suffered martyrdom for their faith in Jesus Christ sitting on thrones. Who were these people, and what is meant by this imagery?

These are the same suffering saints described at Revelation 6:9-10 who cried out to God for divine vindication. Now, in chapter 20, they are said to be those who had not served the beast. This beast was introduced at chapter 13 and identifies with the great ruling power of that day, Imperial Rome, or “Babylon.” This oppressive beast is de-destroyed by the Christ, God’s warrior king, according to Revelation 19.

In this, these martyred Christians found God’s vindication, the vengeance for which they had prayed. Whereas they were seen in chapter 6 under the altar of persecution, they are depicted in chapter 20 as raised up to sit on thrones of victory by way of the divine judgment they had prayed for being given to them. Thus, John wrote, “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

Sadly, premillennialists have construed this powerful symbolism to mean that Christ will establish an earthly reign in Jerusalem and reign there upon David’s physical throne for a literal thousand years. All of this is said in spite of the fact that neither Revelation 20, nor any other passage says anything of the kind. It also ignores the symbolism of “a thousand years,” that this figure consists of multiples of 10, the ancient power number. What we have, then, is 10x10x10 depicting the multi-plicated power and greatness of Christ’s reign founded upon his conquest over the power of Satan and made available to mankind in the gospel.

Thus, living and reigning with Christ has nothing to do with an earthly reign in which Christians exercise some degree of earthly governance. Rather, it has to do with sinners being redeemed from the death of sin and made alive to God in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:11-14). In this, being made alive in Christ, one is said to reign with him, that is, one enjoys dominion over sin and death in him (Romans 5:17).

Those who reign with Christ are said not only to live with him, but also to be priests of God (Revelation 20:6). But since one who submits to Christ then lives with him (Romans 6:11) and is then a priest to God in him (Revelation 1:6), it follows that reigning with him occurs then, also, i.e., at the same time—presently, in Christ Jesus.—Jerry F. Bassett