

The Apocalypse of St. John

Chapter 20

INTRO:

OBS (Orthodox Bible Study) excerpts: We now come to another controversial part of the Apocalypse, the so-called Millennium (or "thousand years"). There were three main interpretations among Christians about this. These are briefly summarized as follows:

(a) Premillennial View (Chiliasm): In this view when Christ returns to earth and the saints are then raised from the dead, they will reign with Him in Jerusalem for a thousand years. Only after that are all men judged as eternity begins. This was popular in 2nd & 3rd centuries and many Protestants today teach a variation of it. But it was formally rejected by the Church at the 2nd Ecumenical Council at Constantinople (AD 381).

(b) Postmillennial View: In this view, the 1000 years symbolize that period of history during which the Gospel goes forth and gradually has its full effect of Christianizing the world. It is only after this thousand-year period of unprecedented faith and earthly utopia that Christ will return in glory. This view is not commonly held amongst the ancient Churches.

ADD: For us, rather than forcing a literal or chronological meaning onto this passage, this passage will be interpreted symbolically, in accord with the same interpretative principals we have used throughout the entire book of the Apocalypse.

(c) Amillennial View: There is no literal millennium. This view was held in the early Church by St. Augustine of Hippo amongst others. The "thousand years" or long period of Christ's kingdom are really NOW as Christ rules in the world through His Church.

According to Fr. Lawrence Farley:
What we are given here in chapter 20 is primarily an answer the question, "What reward will the martyrs have -those who have paid the supreme sacrifice...?" This was no mere theoretical or academic question for the recipients of this book. Christian families and churches in the early centuries saw their members -men, women & young people-taken away, tortured, and even publicly killed. The question of what would become these martyrs was an urgent and heartbreaking pastoral concern. This is the main point of the the passage we read today. - P. 206.

Read 20:1-3

OBS (Orthodox Bible Study excerpts from Fr. Farley): We see (v. 1) an angel having the key of the abyss and a great chain. In other words he has the authority to render Satan powerless and ineffective against the Church (mention St. Augustine). Through Satan's deception, the nations had been deceived into worshipping the beast and martyring the saints. The angel now seizes the dragon and casts him into the abyss so that Satan should not deceive the nations any longer.

OSB (Orthodox Study Bible) Note 20:1

OSB Note 20:2

OSB Note 20:3

Read 20:4-6

OBS St. John then sees (v. 4) thrones and those who sat on them. These are most likely those who were once judged falsely and condemned for their faith in Christ who are now the ones sitting on the thrones, reigning with Christ and judging the world. The thousand-year reign of the martyrs is a way of expressing the reward that will be given them for their extraordinary suffering and faithfulness.

ICSB (Ignatius Catholic Study Bible): Who are some of those beheaded for their witness to Jesus (v. 4)? Martyrs such as St. John the Forerunner and Baptist (Mk 6:27) and the Apostles James (Acts 12:1-2) and Paul (according to Christian Tradition). These and others who were martyred for their faith reign with Christ in a special way (Rev. 20:6) even though all believers share in the royal-priestly reign of Christ (v. 4).

Add: What does it mean to have the mark of the beast or his image on one's foreheads or on their hands (v. 4)?

What does v. 5 mean?

Add: The first resurrection is dying and rising with Christ in Baptism. We have to be Baptized (or immersed) into His death in order to be raised with Him (according to St. Paul Rom 6:3). At the time of the Apocalypse, and even now, this is accomplished in two common ways: Either (1) through the sacramental Mystery of Baptism (in water, in the name of the Holy Trinity), or (2) through Baptism in Blood (which is code for Martyrdom). So the first part of verse 5 is a parenthetical statement and the end of verse 5 goes along with the end of verse 4: "They lived with Him a thousand years" (meaning those who had been Baptized –all Christians who

were Baptized and all Martyrs baptized in their blood for Christ). Either way you are joined to Christ in Baptism. The other dead who remained dead for a thousand years then would be those who were not Baptized into Christ, would not be raised and enjoy life with Christ until the time when He comes again. As Fr. Thomas Hopko states: Those who have died in Christ through Baptism & Martyrdom are already reigning with Christ -right now! The second death cannot touch them! Then at the end ---when “those who are alive are caught up into the air” (which means everybody will be raised)--- those who are alive will not precede those who have died. Then will be the ultimate and final end & judgment of the world (Apocalypse CD 4, Track 2).

ICSB: Blessed (v. 6) is the fifth of seven beatitudes in Revelation. The first death is the unavoidable physical death we all inherit from Adam. The second death is avoidable. It's the death of dying outside of God's love and communion. That's hell.

OSB Note 20:4-6

Read 20:7-10

OBS Satan will be loosed from his prison and there will be one final assault on the camp of the saints and the beloved city. This final war referred to as

Gog & Magog, from the four corners of the earth, is against the City of God (i.e. the Church). Similar to apocalyptic images found in Ezekiel (38-39), St. John describes this last attempt of the nations to wipe out of the people of God. But God defends His people sending fire down from heaven which devours them. The devil then is cast into the lake of fire just as the beast and the false prophet were. Together they will be tormented day and night (lit., unto ages of ages).

OSB Note 20:7-10

OBS: All of the eschatological teaching of the Church presupposes that the Last Judgment would be preceded by a final outpouring of evil and an assault upon the Church. The loosing of Satan is part of the overall story but his end will be the same as that for the beast at the final Armageddon. The Church may be surrounded by her foes, but the Lord will come to rescue her at the End and destroy all evil. P. 207

Read 20:11-12

OBS: Now comes a description of the last judgment (v. 11). The throne is called great because its Judge will pass sentence on all who have ever lived. It is

white because of the irreproachable purity of His judgment and the justice of His verdicts. -P. 208

OSB Note 20:11

OBS: They flee from His face (v. 11) attempting to evade His scrutiny and avoid His judgment. But this is not possible: "no place for them [to escape] was found for them." This image of final justice would have been very comforting to the martyric Church that saw so little justice during its time on earth [just as it should be for us today]. The early Roman judges who sent the innocent to death will find themselves being judged. -P. 208

OBS: Not just the Roman judges, but all the dead, small and great (v. 12) will one day find themselves before the throne. the -P. 208.

OSB Note 20:12a

OBS: These books will be opened, containing the truth about their works. All will be judged, each one, according to those works. As it states in Rev. 12:17, if they kept God's commandments, this will be disclosed. But, as it states in 9:20-21, if their works were those of idolatry, murders, sorceries, fornication, and theft, this will be disclosed too. The books will contain an accurate account of all their deeds.

OSB Note 20:12b

OBS: The book of life (v. 12) contains the record of those destined for life (see 13:8 and comments). In being assured that the book of life will be opened, the Christian readers are assured that God will not forget His promise to give them eternal life. Their reward is sure. This promise is assured to us also (cf. Rom. 2:6-7).

Read 20:13-15

OBS: Not only will those thought to be irretrievably lost in the sea (v. 13) be given up to judgment but even Death and Hades will deliver up its dead. Everyone will come forth to face God's justice. -P. 208-209

OSB Note 20:13-15

OBS: Then at the end (v. 14) Death and Hades (the realm of the dead) will also be cast into the Lake of Fire. If anyone was not found written in the book of life (v. 15), he will be cast there too. In other words, in the end, there will be only two fates awaiting all the children of men: eternal life with Christ or eternal damnation. The only alternative to the lake of fire was to be enrolled in the book of life of the Lamb who was slaughtered.

Conclusion: The purpose of these terrifying verses is a pastoral one: It is to encourage those who are under persecution for their faith in Christ to not fall away but to hold on to their faith. In this way it should offer the same hope and encouragement for all of us to do the same! -P. 209

Fr. Thomas Hopko on the Millennium:

“It is the Church’s teaching that we are in the last time from the time of Christ until the end. The Last Time may last chronologically a long time. But we are in the last time. The Christian always lives in the immediate and imminent coming of Christ. For a Christian living in the last time and living in eternity, it is “soon.”

It is our teaching (and this is the teaching of the Apocalypse) that when we die, if we die before the Lord comes, those who die –especially those who die in Christ and are Baptized and believe in Him, that they enter into His kingdom and reign with him – already now- in spirit. The souls of the righteous dead are in him. If we are in Christ and have the Holy Spirit in us... then those who die are already raised in Him and this is the first resurrection. The first resurrection is the baptismal resurrection in the Church which we believe allows us not to be

overcome by death, because Christ is risen and has destroyed Sheol, He is already glorified. And if we are in Christ when we die, we are glorified in Him.

That's why we believe the saints who are dead in Christ that they are making intercession for us and they are with Christ. They are alive in Christ, they have passed over from death to life... but in the spirit. The end still has to come with the raising of the dead & the raising of our bodies. So we do believe the righteous dead are in Christ. We believe at the end of history Christ will come again in glory that all the dead will be raised as St. Paul states in the 1st Corinthian letter (15), that they are raised with a spiritual body. We are not just raised biologically and even Jesus' resurrection was not biological resuscitation. The angel didn't move away the stone to let Jesus out... but to show He was no longer there. St. Paul says that in the resurrection we will be as He is, meaning a divinely energized body. For us that is important because we believe that the body is not evil (we are not Manicheans, Platonists or Spiritualists). We believe that the world, the animals, the plants and so on, are all good and are saved by God. That's why we say on Pascha (Easter), "Heaven and earth rejoices." We are not spiritualists, it's not just our souls that are saved. The resurrection of our body into a spiritual reality means there is some kind of salvation of the material

world. We don't know how but we are certain that God will save the material world because He made it and it is good, indeed it is "very good."

Glory to Jesus Christ!
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