

- Far from being a key, Revelation 20 is a recapitulation of many clear teachings of the Bible. While its language is apocalyptic, it does not contradict the clear passages. It reiterates those teachings.

In studying the Revelation one needs constantly to keep in mind Paul's admonition that the letter kills while the spirit gives life. One, must go beyond the stage settings and chin whiskers in John's spiritual drama. The spirit of Revelation 20 coincides perfectly with the clear teachings of the New Testament. Here, as in John 5, the writer describes two resurrections – the first being the new birth, the second being the bodily resurrection. The first resurrection takes place when one is born from above, and, immediately, one is made a participant in the ongoing millennial reign of Christ; this is the kingdom of God, wherein God now reigns in the hearts of all true believers. The second resurrection will take place at the harvest which is the end of this present age; this will precede the general judgment (compare Matt 25:31-46 with Rev 20:11-15). This is to be followed only by the final state which is described in Revelation 21 and 22.

The present phase of the kingdom and the millennium are synonymous terms. The kingdom is best defined as God reigning in the hearts of his followers. The great majority of chiliasts – premillennialists, futurists, and dispensationalists – agree that the kingdom of God is the millennium. They argue, however, that it does not exist today, but will be established after the second coming of Christ. They distinguish between the kingdom of heaven – which they admit exists today – and the kingdom of God.

The New Testament uses the terms kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven interchangeably (compare Matt 11:12 with Luke 16:16; and Matt 4:17 with Mark 1:14,15). Since the kingdom and millennium are admittedly one and the same, and since the kingdom already is a reality – then the millennium of Revelation is realized eschatology. The millennium, like the kingdom, was instituted by our Lord.

Although Jesus manifested the kingdom (millennium) at his first advent, it will be consummated at his second coming, then turned over to God the Father.

Each school of thought agrees that the millennium represents a co-reigning with Jesus. The Scriptures teach that the kingdom presently belongs to Christ, but that he will turn it over to the Father once the last enemy (death) has been destroyed. In order for one to co-reign with Jesus, that reign would need to take place before the kingdom ceases to be under the jurisdiction of Jesus.

One cannot accept the fact of a general resurrection or universal judgment and still be a chiliast. Thus to prove from the Scriptures that there will be a universal or general judgment is to prove, ipso facto, that the millennium – whatever else one might believe about it – must take place before the judgment.

Revelation 20, the only chapter in the entire Bible which mentions the millennium, records a universal judgment (vss. 11-15) following the millennium.

Historic Christian teaching has always been that:

1. as a result of the fall, the earth and mankind have been under Satan's spell;
2. the Old Testament prophets predicted a golden age during which Messiah would overcome Satan, write God's laws on the hearts of God's people, and reign over the earth with his people;
3. Jesus, at his first advent, overcame Satan (bound him) and instituted the golden age;
4. all believers-having been released from Satan's power – reign with Christ;
5. Jesus will return a second time to the earth, and at that time there will be a universal resurrection, universal judgment, renewing of the earth;
6. then follows the final state in which all believers will reign throughout eternity in heaven while all unbelievers will suffer punishment in hell throughout eternity.

These historic teachings represent the thinking of the great majority of church fathers, Protestant reformers, Christian educators, and recognized commentaries. They are also subscribed to by every major denomination, and no extant creed differs noticeably from them. Yet, surprisingly enough, beliefs which are foreign to these have infiltrated just about every known denomination.

These beliefs are taught throughout the Bible in a progressive revelation. They are just as surely taught in the book of Revelation. There, John uses the style he was inspired to use, i.e., apocalyptic language. This type of language makes great use of poetry, symbols, numerology, and the like. John forewarns his readers of his intention to do this very thing. This is the meaning of the word signify in the very first verse of the Revelation.

Apocalyptic language does not make the book of Revelation any less true than any other part of the Bible. In fact, there is usually deeper truth in symbolic language than can be expressed in plain words. This apocalyptic language does make it extremely important that each reader bridle his imagination. Otherwise, he may place too much emphasis upon the stage and actually miss the message of the play itself.