



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Divine Purpose in History and Prophecy, part XX

Revelation 20: 4 – 6

Eschatology Doctrinal Studies “The Kingdom of the Thousand Years”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] I've been asked by the elders to make mention of the fact that Don Brooks was operated on today. Many of you know of his difficulties and that the operation went very well. And so we have reason to be optimistic, and he and his family have reason to be optimistic with regard to the future.

Next Wednesday night, we are coming to the end of our study tonight in the “Divine Purpose in History and Prophecy,” and next Wednesday night I am beginning at the elder's request or permission or whatever, an exposition in more Bible study form of the Epistle to the Hebrews and this will go on for some time. And so I hope that you will be reading the epistle, and we're going to study it together. I mentioned to them in a meeting which they asked me to attend, that I'm trying to finish a commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, and it would make it easier, much easier for me if we concentrated on something which probably I'll be involved in for, if I live long enough for several years, and I'm looking forward to the study of it again. It was twenty-seven-years ago, I think, that this epistle was expounded in Believers Chapel when most of you were

kids, and so I'm looking forward to preaching through the epistle again. There is a possibility, if the congregation and the elders feel that they would like to continue to continue the radio broadcast, we'll, there's a possibility, strong possibility, that we'll be using these messages for the radio. And so it will be, essentially, messages that I would ordinarily deliver in a congregational meeting, so we understand that with reference to it. But I hope that you will begin reading the Epistle to the Hebrews, and interacting with that great book, which has to do with the high priesthood of Jesus Christ, and is really one of the neglected epistles of the New Testament.

Tonight we are finishing our studies in “Divine Purpose in History and Prophecy” and concluding with a study in, excuse me, in the Book of Revelation on the “kingdom.” We could go on further, but for those of you who're interested in the exposition of the Book of Revelation, the last few lectures would bear so much on this topic that I thought it was perhaps wise not to go over it again. At any rate, this is the last of our series of studies in the “Divine Purpose in History and Prophecy.”

Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for the privilege that is ours to come together again to study the word of God. We thank Thee, Lord, for the conviction that the Holy Spirit has brought to our hearts; that it is that which is truly important for us, as we seek to live our lives in the latter part of the twentieth century in a way that will be pleasing to Thee, and will be useful to Thee in the divine purpose, which is being carried out to its ultimate glorious conclusion. We thank Thee, Lord, for the hope that we have. We look forward to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we look forward to participation in that, as one of those redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. We are so grateful and thankful, that in marvelous, marvelous mercy Thou hast dealt with us, and brought us to the knowledge of our sins, and to the knowledge of our Savior who

gave himself for us on the Cross at Calvary. We pray, Lord, that Thou will be with us as we conclude our study this evening.

And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Returning to Revelation chapter 20, verse 4 through verse 6, one of the great passages on the kingdom of God, and I'd like to read it now, and then we'll launch into our study. The apostle writes, and he's been giving a series of visions that he saw.

“And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus, and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads, or on their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection; over such, the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

We're living in rather interesting times because in the last century there was a body of people called the Millerites who went out on a mountain and waited for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And ever since then, people studying prophecy have reminded individuals that when we talk about the coming of the Lord or the coming kingdom, it's well not to assume that we know the answers to the time of the coming of the Lord. As a matter of fact, you'll remember the Lord Jesus warned us with reference to the second advent to the earth that no one knew the precise time of the coming other than the Father in heaven. In fact he said, “Angels did not, and even the Son, but the Father only.” Now, of course, when we hear something like that, we want to say, “Well, is not the Son the second person of the Trinity, and did he not know?” Well, of course,

he did know, but as the mediator following the Holy Spirit's guidance, as the mediator, that was knowledge withheld from him at the time at which he spoke it. As the divine Son, he, of course, knows the end from the beginning.

But, at any rate, we have again in 1992 people who have what one of the magazines has called “apocalyptic fever.” On the eve of the third millennium of the Christian Era, we have thousands of Korean Christians who have sold their property, left their families, and went out on October the 28th to wait for the coming of the Lord. Now mind you, there has been great revival in the country of Korea since about nineteen hundred and six in this century, and literally, thousands and thousands perhaps millions have been converted, and we are thankful for that. But these individuals went out in October to wait for our Lord's return, and several expectant mothers in this group had abortions, so as to be more easily raptured they thought. Now you can see, of course, that there is an inadequate knowledge of divine truth, but, nevertheless, they were out waiting for the Lord's return.

Now we laugh because we're in wise America, but we have a man who has Christian credentials, as a matter of fact, his theology is on the side of the Reform Theology, Harold Camping, who has now written a book in which he has predicted that the Lord Jesus is going to come in nineteen ninety-four. And to show you how the Christian public is attracted to this, he wrote this book in September, it was published on September the 8th. It's had three printings since that time. Astonishing. Well, I don't know whether some of you have bought it or not, “1994,” but that will indicate at least that “apocalyptic fever” is something that's under the surface of Christian testimony and Christian witnessing it seems, almost always.

One of the reasons for this, of course, is that there are dreams of utopia that reflect the things that are found in the word of God. They are common to mankind. They extend over the history from the time of Plato's Republic, and Plato was not a Christian, but, nevertheless, the interest in utopia is common to human nature. Augustine, a

professing believing man, wrote the famous work, “The City of God” in which he dealt with issues like that as well in great detail. There is Thomas Moore’s “Utopia,” the satiric “Brave New World” of Aldous Huxley, written in 1932. In other words, there is within the human nature it seems, this very great, perhaps God implanted, interest in the future as the anticipation of the glorious work of the God in heaven.

Well, the Bible does tell us, that there are going to come to pass events that will lead to a kingdom of God upon the earth, perhaps in a staggeringly surprising way. We who are believers, we won’t be quite as surprised because we know the Scriptures teach that the Lord Jesus is going to return, and we’ve looked at some of the passages, such as the one in Revelation chapter 19. But from the standpoint of the word of God, we can say there is an Atlantis, there is an El Dorado, there are Isles of the Blessed. In a word, a golden age and place, but found only in the coming universal earthly kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, men in talking about the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Christ, have tended to equate the kingdom of God, one of the great concepts of human existence, with democracy or they have equated it with the Church. Both of these, according to Scripture are far from the teaching of the word of God. We don’t deny that there has been a great achievement by democracy, but democracy is a long way from the kingdom of God. In one sense, individuals have sought to compare the two; the kingdom of God with democracy, and even have suggested that democracy is a reflection of the kingdom of God. But if it is a reflection, it’s a very poor reflection. The idea of the kingdom of God upon the earth being something like a prime minister elected by the people, a little bit more significant and important than the rest of us. Someone has suggested, the prime example of gorgeous humanity is a far cry from the kingdom of God. There is no democracy in the kingdom of God that is going to come to pass upon the earth. We have a sovereign Lord in heaven who will dictate the terms and the life

that is carried on in the kingdom of God. Of course, we'll be happily dictated by him, but nevertheless, it will not be anything like a democracy.

So what does the word of God say? Well, one of the passages that deals with this question is the passage that we've looked at; it's the completion of the first resurrection, and the description of the kingdom age. Now, it's going to be necessary for me to define the terms that will help us to understand this passage a little more, and it will also help us to understand some of the problems of it. So let me define a few things. I've already, I believe, done this, but I didn't go back and look over all of my notes to be sure but it won't hurt us to go through it again.

There are three systems of prophetic interpretation, broadly speaking. There is what is called, “post-millennialism.” There is “amillennialism,” and there is “pre-millennialism.” Now, these terms are terms that are derived from Latin words. For example, the term for a thousand years is a Latin word “mille.” The term for a year is *annus*. In fact, the Queen, just a week or two ago in her speech to parliament, made reference to the fact that the year just past had been *Annus horribilis*; that is a “horrible year.” And so Latin is something with which we are faced, even in our public life. *Mille*, a thousand. *Annus*, a year. Now, you also know that the Latin word “after” is *post* or *post*. You know too that “pre” is a suffix that refers to that which is “before.” You may not be familiar with the “a” before “millennialism.” These three terms; post-millennialism, amillennialism, pre-millennialism are terms derived from the coming of our Lord, and our words that are made from that particular event; that is, that event as is responsible for the terms. When we say “post-millennialism,” the meaning of that expression theologically is that the Lord will return before the thousand-year kingdom upon the earth. The *mille - annus*, but “post.” Did I say before? I meant after. Some of you are smiling that proved a few of you were listening, and the others who weren't smiling, why weren't you? At any rate, the term is derived then from the kingdom, the coming of our Lord. So “post-

millennialism” is the viewpoint that the Lord Jesus will return after the thousand-year reign.

Now, that kingdom will be brought to pass by the preaching of the Gospel, according to most post-millennialists; that is, the Church will so preach the Gospel, and God will so bless that we shall, in a sense, create a kingdom of God upon the earth to which the Lord Jesus will return and find his kingdom in existence. And he in his coming will be the climax of that work. Amillennialism is a term derived from a Greek prefix, together with *mille* and *annus*. And the Greek prefix, the little word “a” or *alpha* is the Greek equivalent of the English “un.” For example; “uneaten,” not eaten; “unknown,” not known; “uncaring,” not caring. It’s a negative. So “amillennialism” is a term that says that there will not be a thousand-year kingdom of God upon the earth. Amillennialism then teaches, there will be no thousand-year kingdom of God upon the earth.

Now, this particular viewpoint was traceable probably to Tichonius, but it was popularized and normally is traced today by theologians to Augustine. The principles of it involve an allegorizing of Scripture, generally speaking. It involves also that the viewpoint largely and generally that the promises made to Israel, such as those covenantal promises we’ve been talking about, are promises that are fulfilled in the Christian church. In other words, the term “Israel” referring to ethnic Israel in the Old Testament, the promises given to them, the promises of their promises are fulfilled largely in the church, which is generally regarded by them as being the New Israel. So when you hear somebody say, “New Israel,” you may be listening to someone who is an amillennialist, not necessarily, but you may be.

Many of the Bible teachers who have talked about these things, have tended to say that amillennialism arose out of disillusionment with post-millennialism, and in fact, some have suggested that amillennialism that there will be no kingdom of God upon the earth, is simply disillusioned post-millennialism because the idea that the preaching of the Gospel shall cause so many people to be swept into the kingdom of God that the

kingdom will come to pass on the earth through the activities of the preaching of the word of God, and then the Lord will come, seems so contrary to what has happened in our history that it's largely incredible and has been largely given up, although there are some that still hold to post-millennialism, and there is from time to time a rebirth of interest in it, but it's been extremely small. Another characteristic of amillennialism is that the thousand years of Revelation 20: 4 through 6, is regarded as a symbolical time period; not as a specific period of time of a thousand years, but simply an ideal term which may refer to an ideal period of time. Pre-millennialism, the third of these terms is by virtue of a Latin prefix “pre,” a viewpoint that the Lord Jesus will return before the kingdom of God upon the earth, and as a matter of fact, he will be the one who will bring it to pass. He will bring in the kingdom himself.

Now, we looked at Daniel chapter 2, and we saw that that, it seemed, was the teaching of that particular chapter; that God will bring the kingdom of God into the earth, and bring it to pass that there is a kingdom of God upon the earth by his own sovereign intervention in the affairs of men. The outstanding supports for pre-millennialism, there are many of them, but the outstanding ones are simply this: that if one reads, first of all, one reads the Bible, a normal reading of the Bible suggests that the thousand-year kingdom is a literal kingdom upon the earth. We read this passage, in which the term “a thousand years” is found six times. We'll talk about that in a moment. But you can see that if you just read this normally, you would feel that the Bible does teach there is going to be a kingdom of God upon the earth for a thousand-year period of time. So a normal interpretation of a literary work such as the Bible would lead to that viewpoint.

Secondly, the early Church; in the case of those who wrote with reference to a kingdom of God upon the earth. In the early Church, those that wrote were pre-millennialists. We do not have any indication of a pre-millennialist in the early first two or three centuries of the Christian Church, at least, who wrote anything. Now, we know there were some who believed that because Justin Martyr, when he talked about the

kingdom of God and he himself, the great apologist, the first great apologist of the Christian Church, was a pre-millennialist. He went on to say that there were others who don't agree with us, but he said, “We who are right-minded Christians believe this.” There was a sense of humor on the part of the early Church fathers it seems. So we know there were some who disagreed, but they didn't write anything. And so the early Church, so far as we can tell, those who did write on it, were pre-millennialists. And so normally, I think we would say, it's likely that the early Church was largely pre-millennial.

A third support for pre-millennialism is the fulfillment of prophecy as recorded in the Bible, both in the Old Testament but particularly in the New Testament. The prophecy of the Old Testament is fulfilled, as you know, in a literal fashion over and over and over again. The prophecies can be shown to be fulfilled literally. I'm not sure that I can turn in my notes to specifically deal with that point, but most of you who have read the Bible much at all, know that that is true; that the New Testament, well here's a paragraph that I could read. “The New Testament suggests that those prophecies are fulfilled literally.” For example, Christ came literally out of Bethlehem, as the Old Testament prophesied. He rode literally on an ass into Jerusalem, as Zechariah said. He was literally betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, as Zechariah also says. His hands and his feet were literally pierced on the Cross, as Psalm 22 says. Literally, his bones were not broken, however, as Psalm 34 says. Literally, his side was pierced by a lance, as Zechariah 12:10 says. He died and was buried literally, as Isaiah 53 says, and also literally rose again on the third day, as the Psalms and the Book of Hosea seem to suggest. So if we looked at the New Testament, and read it in normal language, and particularly with reference to fulfill prophecy, we would say that the evidence supports pre-millennialism.

Now, another of the supports that is important, there are several I'm bypassing, but another that is very important, is the development of chapters 19 and 20 in the Book of Revelation, because what we have is a series of visions on the part of the Apostle John. There are seven of these visions, and if one interprets these visions in a normal way, we

would conclude that since we have, for example, the coming of our Lord in chapter 19, verse 11 through verse 16, then we have the destruction that takes place upon the earth, our Lord taking the beast and making war against him, and against those who are supportive of him, and, ultimately, overcoming those who are opposed to him. And then in chapter 20, we read here of the binding of Satan, and finally in verse 4 of chapter 20 we read of the kingdom. So you can see that in the flow of the argument of chapters 19 and 20, we have the second coming in chapter 19, and we have the kingdom in chapter 20, and these visions are connected. If you'll read carefully, John is connecting these visions in one overall pattern of a series of visions. As a matter of fact, within the visions one can see progress of time. So pre-millennialism then would seem to have the support of the Old Testament fulfill prophecy, of the argument of Revelation 19 and 20, of normal interpretation, and, evidently, was the viewpoint of the early Church.

Well now, we're going to look at these verses 4, 5, and 6. And we'll have that in the back of our minds as we go through the passages. And first of all, in verse 4 we have the vision of the thrones and the saints.

“And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

Now, I want you to notice the logical progression of the visions, and particularly of the little word “and.” Chapter 19 in verse 11, “Now I saw.” Now, my translation is not true to the Greek text in this respect; that is, the Greek text has the little conjunctive particle “and,” so I'm going to read from the original text so you can catch the force of what I'm trying to say. In verse 11 in the original text we read, “And I saw.” Our text, the

one I'm reading, says, “Now, I saw.” But “and I saw,” the little Greek expression *kai aidon*. Then in verse 17, my text has, “Then I saw,” but in the Greek text we have again, “And I saw.” Verse 19, “And I saw.” In chapter 20 and verse 1, “And I saw.” Verse 4, “And I saw.” Everyone of these, the same Greek expression, *kai aidon*, “And I saw.” In verse 7 or verse let's see, verse 11, “And I saw a great white throne.” In chapter 21 in verse 1 with the new heavens and a new earth, “And I saw.”

So what we have here is a series of visions, and they are connected by that little expression, “and I saw.” There is a logical progression in them as you go through this, and you can see that there is a connection in time because in verse 7 we read, “Now when the thousand years have expired” indicating that there is a chronological progression in these “and I saw's.” And to get some of the force, let's also read chapter 19, verse 21, and then read chapter 20, verse 4 through verse 6. In chapter 19, verse 21, we read.

“And the rest were killed with the sword, which proceeded from the mouth of him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.”

Now, we'll just omit the section about the binding of Satan, and read in verse 4, “And I saw thrones.” So after the coming of the Lord and the battle, there's a brief parenthetical vision which has to do with the binding of Satan. But the next vision follows along after the passage having to do with the coming of the Lord; “Coming of the Lord, therefore,” “pre” kingdom because we read of the kingdom in chapter 20, verse 4.

Now, in verse 4 then we read, “I saw thrones, and they sat on them.” The question that one might ask is; to whom does the term “they” refer? Well, the term “they” has been given some different interpretations, but let me just suggest to you that the “they,” “the plural pronoun, if one reads chapter 19 in verse 20, then the immediately preceding antecedent, the plural antecedent has to be those that came with our Lord

when he came from heaven. You know, in verse 11 we read that, “The armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed him on white horses.” And so when we read, “I saw thrones, and they sat on them,” we at least have all of those saints. But now further and you’ll have to take my word for this, unless you take time out and read Daniel chapter 7, this particular section verse 4 through verse 6, is built upon Daniel chapter 7. If you go back and read Daniel 7 tonight, just before you get in your bed, and think about it, you will see that in the construction and the giving of these visions to John the Apostle on Patmos, the Lord, the Holy Spirit, used phrases from Daniel chapter 7 in describing what was going to come to pass, for the simple reason, that Daniel chapter 7 has to do also with events that lead up to the coming and kingdom of the Messiah. So in Daniel chapter 7, the reference is to all of the saints, so I would suggest to you that when we read here, “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them,” that we are talking about all the saints of God.

And then, specifically, the martyrs are mentioned because their faith is vindicated. “I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them,” “and” not “then”. My text has “then.” Translators of this particular version have been rather free in the use of their particles, but “And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus, and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark, his mark, on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

Now, the martyr’s faith is vindicated, but when we read, “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years,” we have the crux of the controversy over whether there’s going to be a kingdom of God upon the earth or not. The reason this is the crux of the controversy is that amillennialists read this sentence, “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” as meaning “And they were regenerated and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” “And they were regenerated and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” Now, we don’t deny that the regeneration that we

experience, the new birth, is a coming to life. In fact, that’s precisely what it means. To be “born again” is to come to life. But the question is, is that a way in which we are to understand this, “And they lived?”

Pre-millennialists, when they look at that, they read it this way, “And they lived,” that is, were resurrected “and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” So this is the crux of the controversy at this point in this passage. Is “and they lived” a reference to regeneration, or is it a reference to the resurrection of the body? If it’s a reference to the resurrection of the body, amillennial interpretation is overthrown here, for it can only come at the Second Advent. Remember, the Second Advent is the time in which the resurrection takes place. That would mean, there is no kingdom now. Amillennialists like to say, “There will never be a kingdom of God upon the earth. The kingdom of God exists in heaven now.” Sometimes they differ among themselves, as pre-millennialists do on points too, but basically, they think of the kingdom of God as being a heavenly kingdom, and that we are in the kingdom at the present time. We’ll see more in detail here in just a moment; so amillennialists, then, would have no support for a kingdom now if “and they lived” means “and they were resurrected and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” because that would place the kingdom clearly in the future.

Now, when a person is beheaded, do you think of someone who has a natural body? I do. It would be very difficult to behead a spirit body, wouldn’t it? Do you know of any spirit body who has been beheaded? Some of you are smiling. Well, we’ve just read here, “I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus, and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” Well, that would seem to suggest, since beheaded refers to physical life, and not spiritual life, or any kind of life other than physical, that would seem to suggest, that when they live and reign, they are brought back to the kind of life that they lost. Well, they lost physical life, and so now, “They live and they reign

with Christ for a thousand years.” Otherwise, the order according to amillennialism, would suggest regeneration occurs after being beheaded for your faith. You see the point? You see, he said they saw those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus, and now you say, “and they lived,” they were born again, “and reigned for a thousand years”. You have their new birth after they have already been beheaded for their faith. So how did they have that faith, and actually had it so strongly that they endured beheading for our Lord’s sake, apart from being regenerated? But that’s what we would be faced with.

Furthermore, the expression, “and they lived” is an expression that occurs in the Book of Revelation. I don’t have the figures before me. I’m just going to point you to one place. There may be two places. I think there are two places, but one place in particular, in which the reference is to the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice Revelation chapter 2 in verse 8, “And the angel of the church to the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things says the first and the last, who was dead.” And some of you have the translation “and lived, my text says, “and came to life;” the reason is they want to give the force of the Greek aorist tense there, as an ingressive tense and translated, “and came to life.” Well, you can see from that, the reference is to the Lord Jesus, and the reference is to his resurrection, and it’s the same verbal form that is used here. “And they lived.” Just as he came to life after having been dead, that is, was resurrected. So we read of these, “and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

So it would seem, if we take these words at their normal sense then, “and they lived” is “and they were resurrected” and “then they reigned with Christ for a thousand years” which would indicate rather clearly that the kingdom of God is pre-millennial. The question that was asked the Lord Jesus in his ascended state, or rather, in his pre-ascended state, but in his resurrected state in Acts chapter 1. “Therefore, when they had come together they asked him saying; Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”, probably finds its answer right here. “And they lived and reigned with Christ for

a thousand years”; at the coming of our Lord, and that against the time of the fulfillment of the promises to Israel.

Now, a second question that we have to deal with is, where did they reign? We read, “And they,” now, we’re going to translate it, “and they were resurrected;” that is, they lived. “They were resurrected and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” Where did they reign? Well now, we’re talking about the future, so we’ve ruled out reigning at the present time. But where did they reign? Well, let’s look at the context here now in chapter 19 in verse 11, where we have the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. To what place did he come? Well, we read in verse 15, “Now out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should strike the nations, and he himself will rule them with a rod of iron. And he treads the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he has on his robe and on his thigh a name written,” and we go on to read of the carnage that takes place on the earth, because we read in verse 19, “And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him who sat on the horse, and against his army.”

So we’re talking about a “coming again” of our Lord to the earth. Is that not correct? So the Second Advent brings him to the earth. In chapter 20 in verse 9, at the end of the thousand years, they are still on the earth. Verse 9 we read, “They went up on the breadth of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints, the beloved city, and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.” In other words, the context, our Lord coming to the earth, and all of the events transpiring, and even through this section of verse 4 through 6, though they are still dealing with matters that have to do with the earth, leads to the clear conviction that our Lord’s statement here, “And they lived and reigned,” means they lived and reigned upon the earth. They lived and reigned upon the earth, not in heaven.

Now, if you’ll take a look back at chapter 5 in verse 10 of the Book of Revelation, we have that specifically stated as a promise. You’ll notice in chapter 5, this is part of the

vision of our Lord in his kingly character, and in verse 10 we read, “And have made us, or them, kings and priests to our God, and they shall reign.” Now, notice the prepositional phrase, “on the earth.” “They shall reign on the earth.” So to answer the question, where do those who are resurrected at our Lord’s second advent, where do they reign with him for a thousand years? The context of chapters 19 and 20 make it very plain that they reign on the earth. There is an earthly kingdom, and this is the earthly kingdom.

I wish it were possible to deal with some of the more recent literature that has been written with reference to this one well-known work, written some ten or fifteen years ago. I highly regard it, I regard it highly myself, by a man who was professor at Calvin Theological Seminary for a number of years, Anthony A. Houkema. And Professor Houkema took the viewpoint of amillennialism, and in order to answer pre-millennialists, he translated, “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” as being “and they lived,” as being a reference to individuals living in heaven; in other words, in the presence of the Lord. Now, he found it very difficult to find a sense for the word “lived” as a reference to constant living. In fact, the past tense is an argument against it, to start with, because that suggests a point, “and they came to life and reigned” but he thought maybe in one place, he had found a reference to it. But the point was that normally this verb “to live” is not one that is used with reference to living with the Lord in heaven. And so his fundamental contention is contrary to the normal sense of, “and they came to life or were resurrected and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” He could not find any real illustration of that.

Now, verse 5 goes on to talk about the dead, and the first resurrection. This is a parenthetical statement that has to do with the case of the dead. “But the rest of the dead did not live again.” Now, obviously, “to live” here, does not mean, “to live in the presence of the Lord” but rather is a reference to resurrection. The rest of the dead did not live again physically because remember this; everybody is going to be resurrected. The “saved” are resurrected and given a body like Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ’s own

glorious body. The “unsaved” are going to be given a resurrection body too. It’s not described in Scripture, but it’s a body in which they will suffer eternal judgment and damnation. What it is, Scripture does not spell out, but all individuals are resurrected. So the rest of the dead did not, or were not resurrected. We could paraphrase this, “were not resurrected” until the thousand years were finished. “This is the first resurrection,” he says with reference to the believers. Now, you might say, “Well, it’s not really the first, because our Lord was first, the first resurrection in the sense that he was first resurrected.” That’s true, but this is reference or reference of a body of individuals. “This is the first resurrection.”

Now, the first term here is used, relative to the second that will follow, in which the lost are resurrected, and are judged eternally. But now notice, “But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.” Now, Professor Houkema has said that the term “lived”, is a term which he acknowledges, means “resurrection” or involves resurrection is a term that has to do with life in heaven. Now, this term which describes that, is the term “resurrection” here, the noun. “This is the first resurrection.” This noun occurs about forty times in the New Testament, and never refers to anything other than a bodily resurrection. “This is the first resurrection.” Bodily resurrection. In other words, Professor Houkema’s contention will not stand the test of the New Testament use of terms.

And then in verse 6 we read, “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection; over such, the second death has no power, but that is, the resurrected believers who live and reign with Christ for a thousand years shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him for a thousand years.” Now, this is an interpretive beatitude. Notice how it starts, “Blessed and holy is he who has part in.” A beatitude. It’s an expression with reference to them, and it’s in a sense, God’s blessing upon them, and it explains further, what’s happening. “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection.” Why are they blessed? Well in the first place, the second death has no

power over them; that is, they will not experience eternal judgment, as those who have not believed in our Lord. We have died once physically, but we will not die spiritually. We the second death has no power over us. “They shall be priests of God.” That is, the relationship we have to the Lord God for the thousand years, and actually, forever is that we form a heavenly priesthood. We have access to the Lord.

This would have been specially meaningful for Jewish people because in the land of Palestine at this time, if a person wanted to enter into the Temple, he would find his way blocked, ultimately, unless he were a priest. He would go into the Temple, and there would be the court of the Gentiles, and he could get in that, but the next court was the court of the women, and the Gentile men could not enter that. And then beyond the court of the women, there was the court of the Israelites, to which Israelites had access, and then, of course, a court of the priests or where the priests carried out their activities and no one could go there but the priests. So the Old Testament picture was the picture of a limited few who had access to God, and finally, ultimately, Aaron alone, as you know, offered the Day of Atonement sacrifice. So here the idea that “they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” was a marvelous expression of future blessing. And listen it is a marvelous blessing to realize that we are priests of God, if we have believed in him. The doors are thrown open, and we are able to enter into his presence, and know that he hears our voice always; no matter where we are.

If you were caught this afternoon on Central Expressway and couldn't move for a long time what a marvelous opportunity to pray; I wonder how many did. At any rate, the priesthood; this is part of the beatitude.

The third reason he says that these are “blessed and holy” is they shall rule with him for a thousand years. Now, what about this thousand years? It's generally said by those who disagree with the pre-millennial viewpoint that the thousand years is just, perhaps, a symbolic number. Why this number is symbolic, no satisfactory answer is

given, but, nevertheless, it's a round number, and so since it's a round number, it is thought that perhaps it is a symbolic number. Some have suggested that it's ten to the third power, isn't it? Ten times ten times ten equals a thousand, so that makes an explanation of why this is a symbolic number. Doesn't it? No, it doesn't. It didn't to me either, but, nevertheless, that has been an explanation. It's ten cubed, and so, therefore, it's a symbolic number. But why that number instead of something else? Well, there's no justification given for that.

At any rate, here's what I want you especially to note; the “thousand year” is in both the vision and the interpretation. Did you notice that? Verse 4. This is the vision. “And I saw and he saw thrones” and so on in verse 4, at the end of the verse, “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection; over such, the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” Verse 6 is the interpretation of the vision. Now, if it's the interpretation of the vision, wouldn't it seem much more reasonable if verse 6, as an interpretation of a vision, for an explanation of the thousand years to begin to be given? “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection; over such, the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and shall reign for ever in heaven.” But no, the thousand years is still repeated; thousand years in the interpretation. In the vision and in the interpretation that's the sixth time in this passage, beginning at chapter 20 and verse 1, at which the thousand years has occurred, and so it's in the symbolic section of the account of the vision, but it also is in the interpretation. And not only that, will you notice that the change of tense that takes place? In the vision it's, “And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” But in the interpretation in verse 6 it is, “They shall be priests of God and Christ, and shall reign with him for a thousand years.” In other words, it's located in the future, specifically, with the change of tenses; from the past to the future tense.

So when I was studying, first time I ever went through the Book of Revelation in the Greek text was with Everett Harrison, who was Professor of New Testament for a number of years at Dallas Theological Seminary. He's an outstanding teacher and an outstanding student of the Greek text. His father had veered a bit from pre-millennial interpretation, although not from pre-millennialism, but certain aspects of it, and left Dallas Seminary, but his son Dr. Harrison was teaching there, and taught there for many years; was a highly respected professor at Dallas Seminary. And I was very interested in what he was going to say on this passage. I can still remember sitting in his class, and when he came here, he mentioned some of the things that I've mentioned now, and then he mentioned this; that in the vision and the interpretation, the term “thousand years” is still there. And he said these are his precise words because I wrote them down in my notes, “That nails it tight, the thousand years is to be understood as a thousand years, as we understand it. And so it's not a symbolic number. It's a number specifically intended to be taken in its normal sense. There will be a reigning and ruling of one thousand years.”

Well, to talk about what kind of kingdom it would be would mean we would have to turn back to the Old Testament and read those passages in the Old Testament which describe the kingdom, and then a few in the New Testament that make reference to it. The prophets who painted the kingdom in their prophecies, it has been said dipped their pencils in a rainbow because of the beauties of the descriptions that are found in the Old Testament of the kingdom of God upon the earth.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer use to like to say that, “There are four things that are now out of place.” I'm going to suggest five, but there are four things or five. First; Christ is out of place. He is in heaven at the right hand of the Father, but he is David's king, and shall rule and reign upon the earth, according to 2 Samuel 23. Israel is out of place. Israel is scattered in the four corners of the earth, but the Scriptures, in numerous places, speak of Israel being re-gathered, coming to repentance, being born again as a nation,

and receiving the messianic king and ruling with him. The nations are out of place because the nations will be composed of many Gentiles, not all, many Gentiles, who shall be converted through the salvation of Israel, and the events of the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and, actually, not only converted, but sanctified as well. The church is out of place, for the church is here on the earth as a pilgrim body, passing through, giving testimony to the king who is at the right hand of the Father. But the time is coming when the church shall be on the throne with him, ruling and reigning with him. Nature itself is out of place. Nature will be affected too by the coming again of our Lord.

Those marvelous descriptions that are given, for example, in the prophet Isaiah come to mind, in which he says things like, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the young goat. The calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and the little child shall lead them.” “The wolf lying down with the lamb; the leopard lying down with the young goat.” I cannot help but think of Woody Allen who said once, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, but the lamb won’t get much sleep.” But in that time, he will get sleep. The lambs and the young goats will lie down with the wild animals, and they will sleep. This is God’s great, divine society. It’s the world theater of the glory of the Son of God.

When I grew up in the Presbyterian Church, of course, on Sunday morning we recited the Lord’s Prayer every Sunday. The minister prayed in such a way, that he finally led the congregation into that. When I first served here as pastor of the church that is now Northwest Bible Church, but then was the Independent Presbyterian Church, that’s what I did on Sunday morning. I would give the morning prayer, but at the end I would lead into the Lord’s Prayer, and I would have to pray or would pray, it wasn’t “have to pray” but I mean, I would pray, “Thy kingdom come.” Well, that’s precisely what we are talking about here, when we use the expression, “Thy kingdom come;” “The kingdom of God upon the earth; the ruling and reigning of our Lord a thousand years upon the earth.” That’s what that expression refers to, and for those of us who are believers, there’s

a great blessing promised for those who pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and we're living in very interesting days. We are interested in living in days in which individuals are thinking about the second coming.

Harold Camping is a fine Christian man, and he's thinking about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we ought to be too, for that matter. I'm not making any predictions about when he will come, but it should be heavy upon our hearts, as a concern that we, in the intervening time carry out our own testimony in such a way, that the saints are blessed, and that those with whom we come in contact, have a testimony from our Lord Jesus Christ through us. May God help us to do that.

Next week, we'll begin the exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews. I hope you'll be reading the epistle along with me because I intend to study it freshly myself.

Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks for Thy word. We thank Thee for these great promises. We thank Thee for the assurance that we have that there is going to come, a second coming of our great Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that by Thy marvelous grace, we shall rule and reign with him for a thousand years. We look forward to the consummation of the divine purpose and then throughout the ages of eternity as it further unfolds for the glory of our Triune God.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.