

REIGNING WITH CHRIST

"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us." (II Timothy 2:12)

"And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:10)

In this first passage read Paul is assuring us that as members of Christ's body we shall be treated as the Head. If we become united with Him we shall share in His reign as King, for we are but kings and priests under Him.

Before leaving the disciples, to them Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28) The "regeneration" is that period of time between the first Pentecost following the ascension of Christ and His second coming, for it is during this period that the new birth is the law of induction into the church, when those born again become new creatures in Christ, and "old things are passed away", and "all things are become new". (II Corinthians 5:17) During this period of time the Son of Man will sit on the throne of His glory at the right hand of God. After Jesus gave the Great Commission to the apostles, Mark says that "he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

(Mark 16:19) Paul said, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2) But Christ promised the apostles that they would share with Him in His reign. To them He said, "Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The apostles were not promised "thrones of glory", but simply "thrones". To sit upon a throne signifies power, authority and glory. An earthly king occupies a throne--he exercises authority and power. So Christ here promised that His apostles would occupy a relative position "in the regeneration". The idea expressed is that the apostles are the judges, for during their ministry they by inspiration of the Holy Spirit gave the inspired will of Christ--the laws to govern the members of the church. Hence when Christians today turn to the New Testament for instruction and guidance in their Christian duties, the apostles are exercising their power over spiritual Israel--the church, or the redeemed of God.

While yet with the disciples, to them Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) The kingdom had not at that time been given, hence He could speak of it in the future. By "the kingdom" He meant the church with its privileges and blessings. They were encouraged to seek His kingdom, and now He promises that it shall be given them. The apostles became the character members of it.

On the occasion of the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus said to His disciples, "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:29-30)

Here Jesus promised that the apostles would come in possession of the kingdom, for He bequeathed by will or testament to them the kingdom that He came to establish. This shows that they were not at that time in His kingdom, neither were they in possession of the full blessings of that kingdom. The new dispensation was inaugurated on the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ and at that time the kingdom was established and these apostles became the first members of it.

In A.D. 96, more than thirty years after the establishment of Christ's kingdom or church, John wrote these words to his fellow Christians, "And they sung a new song, saying, 'Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.'" (Revelation 5:9-10) The reigning which is here predicted that Christians will do must be done while they are kings and priests. Christians are now kings and priests. This fact the New Testament teaches over and over again. To all Christians, Peter said, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (I Peter 2:5) If we are priests, it follows that we are kings also, for we have been made "unto our God kings and priests". If we are "kings and priests" now, then we are reigning now, for no one can be a king without reigning on a throne. But how do we reign? We reign by Jesus Christ. Paul said, "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17) We reign with Christ by suffering with Him. In the text, Paul said, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." (II Timothy 2:12) It is in this life that we suffer with Him, certainly not in the life to come. And so it is in this life that we reign with Him. Again, we reign with Christ by overcoming the world. To the church at Laodicea, Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." (Revelation 3:21) John said, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (I John 5:4) Hence just as the Laodiceans were promised that they would reign with Christ if they overcame their lukewarmness, so are we promised that we shall reign with him if we overcome the world. Overcoming the world is done in this life, and as we overcome we shall reign with Him. We cannot reign on earth when Jesus comes again, for this world will be destroyed at the second coming of Christ. Peter said, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." (II Peter 3:10)

Christians began to reign with Christ when His kingdom began. The day of Pentecost (fifty days after the resurrection of Christ) marks the beginning of the kingdom of Christ, and every Christian reigns with Christ in His kingdom. Peter had been promised the "keys of the kingdom" by Christ. (Read Matthew 16:18-19)

Peter having the keys of the kingdom, on this memorable Pentecost announced the terms of admission into the church. According to the Great Commission that Jesus gave to the apostles, the apostle Peter told the people on Pentecost what to do to be saved. In answer to their question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?", Peter said unto them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38) Their obedience to these words is seen in the following scripture: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41) But to what were they added? They were added to "the church", for the second chapter of Acts closes with this statement, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47) God has no other way of adding people to the church. From that day until this all who have been added to the church, have been added upon the condition of their faith, repentance and baptism. Being added to the church or kingdom of Christ, they then began their reign with Christ. In AD 64, Paul wrote an epistle to the church at Colosse. To these brethren he declared that God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." (Colossians 1:13) Here these brethren were said to be in the "kingdom of his dear Son". In AD 96, John said, "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." (Revelation 1:9) Thus near the close of the first century of the Christian era, Christians were said to be in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, hence they were reigning with Christ in His kingdom.

But the Premillennialist contends that the reign of the saints with Christ is not to be until after His second coming. The whole theory of Premillennialism has been founded upon Revelation 20:1-6. It is the keystone of the whole premillennial structure, and a failure to prove an "earthly" reign of Christ of 1000 years on earth between the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, means that the whole structure falls. The book of Revelation was particularly addressed to the seven churches of Asia, and was evidently especially written for them. The early church was facing immediate persecution brought about by the pagan emperors, and the book was written for their comfort and encouragement. Hence the general vision of the book brings before us the conflict of the church with pagan Rome. It represents prophetically and symbolically the history of the struggles and triumphs of the early church with the pagan persecuting powers. Hence it was prophecy when written, but it is history now. This advance history was written in symbols and signs in order to conceal from the pagan persecutors the things which Christ would reveal to the churches. A similar situation existed in the earthly ministry of Christ. He spoke to the multitudes in parables, because He knew that their design was to entrap Him, and to this end they would use anything that He might say. Hence He spoke to them in parables, but He explained in private His teachings to His disciples in plain words. When the disciples asked Him, "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?", He answered, "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." (Matthew 13:10-11) Hence the Lord "signified", or set forth in signs and symbols, the things that He wished to say to these early Christians who were under the threat of persecution from the pagan emperors.

The word "signify" means to set forth in signs and symbols. A sign cannot signify itself; a symbol cannot symbolize itself; a type cannot typify itself. It is a violation of all the principles of true exegesis to make a literal application of the signs and symbols of the book of Revelation.

In the sixth chapter of Revelation, verse nine, John says, "And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held." The altar is the scene of defeat and sacrifice. Hence the vision that John saw was of the "souls of them that were slain for the word of God." They were under the altar, defeated and despised, their cause cast down. Their cry for mercy is heard in the next verse, "and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 9:10) They were calling for judgment to come upon their persecutors. The scenes and symbols continue until the twentieth chapter, and here John says, "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." (Revelation 20:4) Here the souls of the martyrs were envisioned on thrones--that was the scene of triumph and victory. Taking the souls out from under the altar--the scene of defeat, and elevating them to thrones--the scene of victory, is described as a resurrection--the resurrection of their cause, the cause for which they had died.

Note that Revelation 20:4 says nothing about the second coming of Christ; it does not mention a reign on earth; it is silent concerning a bodily resurrection; it has nothing to say about all saints; it does not mention the literal throne of David; and it says nothing about Palestine or Jerusalem.

But note again what this passage does say: John said, "And I saw thrones"; not the throne of God or the throne of David, but simply "thrones": "And they sat upon them"--who? Let John tell us, "And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God". Not the bodies, but "the souls". Whose souls? Not yours and mine, but "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God". Here John saw the souls of the martyrs, whose souls he had seen in chapter six, "slain" and "under the altar". But here they are seen on thrones. In the first scene it is a vision of defeat, but in the latter it is a vision of victory. Hence taking the souls from under the altar and elevating them to thrones signifies a resurrection of a cause. Hence they lived in the cause for which they had died. Therefore John says, "And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years". If "reigned" is limited by a literal thousand years, "lived" is also limited in the same manner; hence if reigning ends at the end of the thousand years, the living ends also, which would not be millennium to be desired after all. Who has the right to say that this symbolic expression of "a thousand years", means a literal thousand years?, for Peter says "that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day". (II Peter 3:8)

In Deuteronomy 7:9, it is said that God is "the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations". That is God's memory of His covenant is infinite. Hence the term "a thousand years", denotes completeness, perfection and infinity. Their victory was complete, their triumph perfect and their reign infinite.

I trust that we have been able to see in this study that the "they", who "lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years", of Revelation 20:4, are not the same as "we" of Revelation 5:10, who as kings and priests "shall reign on earth". Our reign with Christ is going on now. When Jesus comes again He will no longer reign, but will deliver "up the kingdom to God, even unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (I Corinthians 15:28) We shall then be privileged to dwell in heaven with Him forever and forever, for He has said, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:3)

Radio Sermon by Melvin J. Wise