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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Divine Purpose #34

“The Consummation of the Covenantal Program (5):

The Kingdom of God, III”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word and for the privilege of the study of it, and we ask that Thou will give us clear minds and enable us to grasp the issues that face us as we look at this passage. And may the result be also an increased knowledge of the word of God and also a more definite submission to the word of God in our daily life as well. We commit our time to Thee. We pray Thy blessing upon each one gathered here.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well, as you can see from the outline, we are continuing our study of “The Consummation of the Covenantal Program,” and this is the fifth of our studies in that aspect of our overall theme. And we are studying, “The Kingdom of God,” and this is the third of our studies on this aspect of the Kingdom of God, specifically, Revelation chapter 20. And that's our text for tonight, as well.

We've been looking at the kingdom of the Messiah. And, of course, coming to Revelation chapter 20, verse 4 through verse 6, we naturally have to deal with the millennial controversy because that's one of the issues that faces the reader of this section.

Now, this is the only place in the Bible in which reference is made to a millennial kingdom. Of course, as you read the passage you'll find that a number of times a reference is made to it. But this is the only place in the Bible in which the millennial kingdom is referred to.

Now, it's not the only place in which the kingdom is referred to and we must keep those things separate in our minds. The Bible is full of references to the Kingdom of God upon the earth. But this is the only place in which the length of that earthly kingdom is set forth, specifically. So, naturally, in the arguments and discussions that have raged over the question of a millennial kingdom, this passage has been important. Occasionally, enemies of the millennial kingdom say that first statement that I said to you, and that's all they say. And so you get the impression that the whole doctrine of the Kingdom of God upon the earth hangs upon Revelation 20:4 through 6. That, of course, is not true. If we didn't have this passage at all, we would know that there was a kingdom of God upon the earth. All of those who are premillennialists would have the same viewpoint; however, they would not know specifically the length of that kingdom. They would also know that it was temporary. That is, with reference to the infinite time of the Triune God; because it's obvious that after a certain period of time, there is a conflict, again, before the institution of the new heavens and the new earth, and so, they would know that it would be, relatively speaking, a temporary kingdom. Or to put it better perhaps, because the term temporary means for us a real short time perhaps it

would be better to use the term "interim" kingdom. So we would know it was an interim kingdom; we just wouldn't know the precise length of it.

Now, we have looked in our previous studies, particularly a couple of weeks ago, at the binding of Satan and we suggested reasons for the event and the reasons that we suggested while about five of them were suggested were primarily related to the fulfillment of the covenant promises, and, also, to the demonstration of the effectiveness of our Lord's redemptive work in this earthly scene, where sin occurred and where the act of redemption also occurred.

So it seems reasonable to expect that in this earth there would be a demonstration of the full effects of our Lord's saving ministry. So to my mind, the Kingdom of God upon the earth has some very reasonable grounds and, furthermore, that one, it seems to me, quite clear that if we should read the Bible through and with it with intelligence and perception we should expect a Kingdom of God upon the earth.

Now, obviously, there are differences of opinion over this and I don't want to create the impression that a person who holds a different viewpoint is simply a dullard or *dummkopf* or something like that. But it's surely true, I think, that we would expect some visible indications of the effectiveness of our Lord's saving work in this creation; and not simply in that which is beyond the present kind of life.

We looked at the reasons why. We thought that the binding of Satan followed the Second Advent. We tried to point out that the order of these visions suggested it. And, furthermore, that there was indication in the visions themselves that there was progression of time or chronological progression, within the visions. And we also sought to show that a recapitulation theory could not satisfy the particular requirements of chapter 20, verse 1 through 3, in order to show that contrary to some who think that

the thought of Revelation 20, goes all the way back to the first coming of Christ, with verse 1, and traverses the same period of time again between the two comings by showing that we read here in verse 4, "And I saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And the souls of the ones who had been beheaded on account of the testimony of Jesus and account of the word of God," and reference is made to the fact that they ruled and reigned for a thousand years.

Now, if they are individuals who are living within the kingdom, but if the kingdom begins with the first coming of our Lord and ends with the second coming of our Lord, then one might ask the question, then why are we speaking about saints who have been martyred? So the fact that they are martyred saints indicates that we do not have a resumption of things from the first coming to the second coming, but rather, we are looking at things after the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth.

Now, it would be possible to deal further with that, but I don't think it's necessary since probably most of you in this room might, if we hadn't brought it up, if someone said something about the recapitulation theory in the Book of Revelation, you'd probably say, "What's that?" because it's not a very popular view. And even among amillennialists, many of them such as Albertus Peters reject it out of hand as being contrary to the flow of thought in the Book of Revelation.

The vision of the thrones and the triumphant saints, in verses 4 through 6, we looked at last week, specifically, and we made the point that they were resurrected saints and they were reigning in the Kingdom of God. They were resurrected because of the significance of the expression, "And they lived and they reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years."

And we made reference, if you remember, to the fact that this term "lived" is a term that refers to the bodily resurrection and not to any kind of spiritual resurrection, such as the New Birth, which historically has been the amillennial interpretation. "They lived" to almost all amillennialists has meant something like, "They experienced the new birth." Or in Anthony Hoekema, in his recent attempt, recognizing the weakness of that, to solve this question has suggested that "They lived" means they enjoy fellowship with the Lord in spiritual life in heaven. And we sought to show that there is, as Professor Hoekema admits himself, this is a very rare, to use his own terms, "This is a very rare use of the word *ζαο*, which means to live." And, in fact, he can only find one place in which he thinks that meaning is found, out of the many occurrences of this word.

So we would be going contrary to sound hermeneutics to take a rare meaning of a word when the common meaning makes perfectly good sense and seek to impose it upon the text. It's one of the illustrations of hermeneutics that we need to keep in mind. We should, ordinarily, prefer the ordinary meaning of terms unless there are exceedingly strong reasons for taking a rare meaning of a term; even though it may have that meaning in some isolated cases. That's a sense, that's a principle of hermeneutics that is forgotten by the great majority of readers of the Bible. They frequently like to find some unusual sense, go against the grain of the common sense, when the common sense makes good sense, and prefer the unusual, sometimes, purely because they like to be different and then, sometimes because they want to defend the view that rests upon that kind of support. Now, we shouldn't do that. It's very difficult. We're all human; we like to defend our position and, frequently, in trying to defend our position, we defend it in an unsound way.

Now, we want to look tonight at what I have in the outline as Roman II: "The fourth last thing, The Kingdom of the Messiah." And, last week, you'll remember, we looked at capital "A" "The Vision of Thrones and Saints," and talked about a few of the things there. And, now, we want to look at "The Dead and the First Resurrection," and a few of the things that I did not refer to, specifically, the meaning of the "rest of the dead," the meaning of "lived not," though I referred to that last week, the meaning of "the thousand years" and the meaning of "the first resurrection." So we'll do this as quickly as we can; and then we'll go on to the interpretive beatitude and try to finish Revelation 20:4 through 6.

Now, notice, let me read again the passage in its entirety. The apostle, remember, is describing visions that were given to him, which were part of the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, which he received. And we have had a series of these visions beginning with chapter 19 in verse 11. Then verse 17. Then chapter 20, verse 1. Each of these beginning with the same Greek expression, *Kai eidon* "And I saw." And here again in verse 4, it occurs again, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was give to them." Now, notice the subject is indefinite. In fact, it can be taken as being indefinite. And that's one of the more minor exegetical points at issue. It is possible to have an indefinite third person in Greek. It's a Hebraic kind of construction. "And they sat upon them." Not intending any specific person, as sitting upon the thrones. That's a legitimate way to read the texts. So you could say, "I saw thrones and they sat upon them," meaning nothing more than "I saw people sitting on the throne." But if we do have a reference to some individuals in the preceding context, because we have "they sat upon them," and we naturally would look for an antecedent, we said that the nearest possible antecedent, plural antecedent, was the group who

came with the Lord from heaven, at his Second Advent. So "I saw thrones and they sat upon them," would be the saints. "And judgment was given to them."

Now, the next phrase is the object, also, of "I saw." It's not stated in full, but we have to understand it that way because the words are in, to use the English expression, in the objective case. If you are a Greek student, you'll recognize the accusative case. And the souls, "Therefore I saw the souls of the one who had been beheaded on account of the testimony of Jesus and on account of the word of God and who are such." And this is a further description of them, "and who are such." That's qualitative relative, and that's why I'm rendering it, "And who are such." "And who are such as have not worshipped the beast, nor his image, and have not received the mark upon the forehead and upon their hand." We would say, "Upon their forehead and upon their hand."

Now, when we say, "the souls of those that had been beheaded," it's obvious that that's a physical death that they've experienced. So we should expect "and they lived." We said last week to be, "and they physically lived." In other words, bodily resurrection. That's further evidence that when we read, "And they lived," we're not talking about spiritual living in heaven or we're not talking about a new spiritual birth, such as when a man is born again and he receives new life.

All of these have been attempts to avoid the meaning, "And they lived and reigned with Christ," because, obviously, if this is a reference to the resurrection, the resurrection hasn't occurred yet. The resurrection occurs, Scripture says, "When the Lord Jesus comes." And so, consequently, if they lived and reigned in the kingdom, it must be after the Second Advent and not in the present day.

And all amillennialists generally have to affirm that the kingdom is now, we're living in that kingdom so this is a key word for them. "And they lived." They have to avoid the physical resurrection if they possibly can. But that's the common sense of the word, and to try to find the other is very difficult, particularly, in the light of what we read in just a moment. "And the rest of the dead did not live."

Well, that sounds as if those who have not received the new birth, for example, will, ultimately, receive the new birth and that complicates things, also. So "They lived and they reigned with the Messiah a thousand years."

Now, later, we'll talk about the thousand years, so I'll leave that for a moment. Now, he says in the 5th verse, "And the rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years are finished." The rest of the dead? Who are the rest of the dead? Well, obviously, Professor Hoekema would like to deal with this question as fairly as possible. I don't want to impute false motives to him. He finds this as a reference to the "lost dead" because that's what seems to be required by the context. But he says, "We're not to think that when it says, "The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years are finished," that that means that the rest of the dead will live at a time in the future. Because if he says the rest of the dead will live, it must be a reference to the bodily resurrection. It's the same word. "The rest of the dead did not live." And, therefore, when it says, the triumphant saints lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years, then you must give it the same meaning in the same context.

And, therefore, it would be a reference to the bodily resurrection. And, hence, the reigning follows the Second Advent, follows the bodily resurrection. That's quite plain. So Professor Hoekema says, "When it says, 'and they lived and reigned with

Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not live,' we are not to think that that final clause, 'until the thousand years are finished,' means that they will live."

And, in fact, he insists that that type of construction does not require that that described in the clause that follows really comes to pass. And he and others have cited a use of this particular word, which can be both used as a preposition and a conjunction, in a passage in Romans 5:13, overlooking the fact that the term has at least a two-fold usage and has a certain meaning where it's a preposition and another meaning when it's a conjunction. And this is a conjunction.

And, further, and this is the most egregious, how do you like that word? This is the most egregious error of all. In verse 3, we have the precise construction that, where it says, "and sealed it above him, in order that he might not deceive any long the nations until the thousand years are finished." And the following context, verse 7 through 10, makes it very plain that he will deceive the nations.

And, so, the following context makes it plain that what is described in this clause "does" take place, right in this very context. I must say when I read that in his book, I thought, now, here is a man who is a scholar and a good one. And he's an excellent theologian. You ought to read his books. You'll profit from them. And he has some very wise things to say in criticism of some views that should be criticized. But, like all of us, we make mistakes. As I told you so often, I made one in 1938. [Laughter] And I make mistakes all the time; and I find them as the years go by. And I'm going to get ready to burn all of my notes, just before it becomes evident, I'm to expire [Laughter] so that no one will get my notes and read and say, "Look what he believed in 1949." Or "Look what he believed in 1965." And "Look what he believed in 1978." Or something like that. Everybody would have a lot of fun and some of my enemies would really

have a lot of fun, so I've got to make arrangements to get rid of those at the last minute. [More laughter] Martha, we'll have to have a conversation about that one of these days.

At any rate, when he says here, "The rest of the dead," well, obviously, this is a reference to the lost. The rest of the dead, those that did not live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. They are the lost. And they are described in chapter 20, verse 12, where we read, "And I saw the dead, the great and small, standing before the throne; and the books were opened."

In other words, those dead who must suffer the judgment of the Great White Throne, standing before the Lord, suggestive of the fact that they have received the bodily resurrection, are the ones who are referred to here. They do not live until the thousand years are finished. So the resurrection of the righteous precedes the Kingdom of God upon the earth. But the resurrection of the lost follows the thousand years upon the earth. That's all so plain, isn't it? It's amazing, really, that one finds such disagreement over it.

Now, the apostle adds, describing the vision that came to him, "This is the first resurrection." Well, now, he's already described two resurrections, so you might ask, "Well, why does he say this is the first resurrection?" Well, the commentators have solved this question, I think, quite well. They have pointed out that this opening statement of verse 5, "The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were finished," is something like a parenthesis in thought because when he's just said, "They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years," the natural question that would arise would be, "Well, what about the rest of the people?" So he adds, in the kind of parenthesis.

And, remember, the apostles did not use parenthetical remarks. We have to interpret in the light of the flow of thought. So what he means, evidently, is to answer your probable question in your mind, "The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years are finished. This is the first resurrection."

Now, strictly speaking, this is not the first resurrection. So from this standpoint, too, when he says, "This is the first resurrection," it's obvious he's talking about the resurrections in this context. Actually, the first resurrection is Christ's resurrection. He has been resurrected. The only person who has been resurrected to this point. So this is a second resurrection what he's talking about. But any rate, in this context, it's the first resurrection. And, we pointed out, incidentally, that this is the first resurrection, this word "resurrection" used here is a word found approximately forty-two times in the New Testament and in only one case does it ever mean anything but a bodily resurrection. So, again, we're talking about bodily resurrections. That's very important. If you don't get everything that I'm talking about tonight and probably some things it would be good if you forgot them but if you don't get everything, please, get some of those important points. And as you read, the text will become, I think, relatively clear to you. So the meaning then of the rest of the text is a reference to lost individuals who appear at the Great White throne judgment. The meaning, therefore of "lived not" is they did not experience bodily resurrection with the saved saints, those who are sitting upon the thrones with the souls of those who had been beheaded on account of the testimony of our Lord and as many, those who had not worshipped the beast nor his image, nor received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand. So "lived not" means did not experience bodily resurrection at that time.

Now, let's think about the "thousand years." It's very common for people to think that the thousand years is not a literal thousand years. Now, I can understand why a person would want to find some other meaning for that, because take Augustine for example. Augustine was a remarkable student of the Bible, incidentally, living in the 4th and 5th centuries, he did not have the advantage of the information that we have, nor of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit down through the centuries. So it is not surprising there were many things he did not understand. But if you study the reformers, such as Luther and Calvin and others, as well, you'll find they leaned heavily upon Augustine. And, in fact, a great deal of the Reformation of which we are the beneficiaries can be traced to Augustine.

B. B. Warfield said, he didn't live long enough because the Reformation that took place in Augustine's thinking did not free him from the sacramental system. If he had lived longer, he would have come to understand that, too, Professor Warfield contended.

But, Augustine, while not dogmatic, came to believe that the thousand years probably marked completeness or fullness of time. He says in "The City of God," in book 20, in about chapters 7 through 10 or 12, when he writes on these questions, he says that at one time he was a "chiliast" or a believer in the thousand years. Chiliasm, a term derived from the Greek; while premillennialism is term derived from the Latin. He said he was a premillennialist, but because of the excessive Gormandizing of the premillennialists of his day, he changed his view. In other words, the premillennialists of his day made such a great stress upon the physical side of the millennium that it rather revolted Augustine and so he changed his view.

Now, therefore, he was faced with a question of understanding this thousand years. And so while he wasn't dogmatic, he said, it probably marked completeness or fullness of time. But what made it further difficult for Augustine was he was living in near the end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century; and a thousand years, of course, must have seemed to him, then, a rather long time into the future. So it's a little uncertain what he really believed about this thousand years. But if he took the thousand years somewhat literally, it's obvious that one would have to change the view.

And so, finally, as the years have passed and the centuries have passed, it's been the common turn of things to take the term in a symbolic way; that is, as a number, because the minute you set up a time in which he's coming, like the Millerites and others, time flows by and you have to change your viewpoint. So he thought of it then as completeness or fullness of time. He gave us his reason, an interesting reason, now, listen to this hermeneutics. For one thousand is the cube of ten, one thousand is the cube of ten. Now, you can see there was a lot of tendency to lean on the doctrine of the Trinity. Ten times ten times ten equals a thousand. And so that suggests that it's a symbolic number. Don't you understand why that is? You're all looking dazed. And no wonder, there isn't any reason in the world why this should be a symbolic number. If you say, ten times ten times ten makes it a symbolic number.

Linske, the Lutheran commentator, who is an anti-chiliasm, echoes the idea speaking of ten raised to the third degree, that of the highest completeness, he doesn't say why a number raised to the third degree, rather than the fifth or tenth degree, refers to highest completeness. What about ten to the hundredth degree?

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No one has demonstrated from ancient literature why one thousand has symbolic significance. In fact, if you'll take the Greek word, *etos*, which means a year and the Hebrew word, *shaneh*, which also means a year, and put a numeral with them, in all of the uses of the Old Testament, there is never a case in which those terms are used symbolically. So one cannot claim a symbolic sense for one thousand by simply repeating the shibboleth, which some do, Revelation is an obscure book. Occasionally, often, people will say that.

Charles Howard had a reverend, a friend of his out in the north part of here, who told him when he asked him what they were studying in his house, he said, "Well, we're studying the Book of Revelation." And the preacher in the congregation in Richardson said, "Ah, John was senile when he wrote that book." [Laughter] But it is common for people to say, "Everybody knows Revelation is difficult." Well, let me tell you this, there's hardly a book in the New Testament that one could outline more easily than the Book of Revelation.

Now, it's true, there are some difficult things in the Book of Revelation. Luther found it very difficult. But he was anti-chiliast. And so there isn't any reason why we should say, "This is a difficult book, therefore, we can make this mean a symbolic number." There's no reason for that. The logic does not really support the affirmation.

No one can support the contention that the term has a non-temporal sense of the sign of the messianic age. One of the more recent commentators on the Book of Revelation of the liberal bent refers to the fact that in later Rabbinic theology that was so. But as R. H. Charles who wrote two massive volumes on the Book of Revelation has pointed out, nowhere else in contemporary or earlier literature is the length of the messianic age said to be a thousand years. The literal sense, therefore, is much to be

preferred. And when we read "they ruled and reigned with Christ for a thousand years," why not say it means a thousand years. That's the simplest meaning. That's the usual meaning of the term "year" with a numeral attached to it. And why it must be symbolic, no one has yet been able to show.

The meaning of the first resurrection? Well, we've discussed that. This is the first resurrection is a reference, therefore, as we've said to the bodily resurrection. So what John has said so far is he's seen a vision of these triumphant saints, sitting on the throne, and he has seen that they have come to live in verse 4, they have received their resurrection bodies and they have reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years. That's his vision.

He says, "The rest of the dead do not live," or "have not lived, until the thousand years have passed." So they are reserved for judgment, as Peter says. And at the Great White Throne judgment, they, the dead, as he will say in chapter 20, in verse 12, the dead stand before God to be judged. It all makes such nice, simple sense.

Well, what about the 6th verse then? "Blessed and holy is the one who hath part in the resurrection," that is, the first resurrection. "Upon these the second death does not have authority. But they shall be priests of God and of the Messiah, and they shall reign with Him for a thousand years." This is rather important interpretive beatitude. I say it's important because of the structure of this section. Notice carefully that John is not talking about the vision at this point. He's given the vision, but here is the beatitude which accompanies it. Now, that will be important in just a moment.

So "Blessed and holy is the one who hath part in the first resurrection; upon these the second death does not have authority." So first of all, John says that the

reason that the ones who have part in the first resurrection are blessed and set apart for God is because they do not suffer the second death.

Now, the second death is a reference to "eternal" death. Just as we will now read in a moment, the dead stand before the Lord and are thrown into the lake of fire; but those who have sat upon the thrones, the triumphant saints, who have lived previously, they do not experience this death.

Turn back to chapter 2, verse 11, of the book. One of the ways to read the Book of Revelation, incidentally, is to read it and let it interpret itself. And a great part of it can be understood if one will just read the book enough. But chapter 2, verse 11, says and this is our Lord's message to the Church at Smyrna, the suffering church, and he says, "The one who hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches; the one who overcomes shall not be harmed by the second death." The first death, physical death; second death, eternal death.

So, first of all, those who have part in the first resurrection are blessed because they will not suffer the second death. They are the saved. They are those who live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. They experience bodily resurrection and they live with our Lord and rule with him for a thousand years. So no wonder the apostle says, "Blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection." But, further, he says, "And they shall be priests of God and of the Messiah." That's the second reason that those who have part in the first resurrection are blessed.

Now, this is a reference to one of the great promises made to the children of Israel. In fact, let's make it broader than that; it was made to the people of God because if we've been trying to show in our series, now of about thirty-five studies or so, we have shown that there is one people of God although we recognize that the one

people of God at various times through the flow of history is characterized by a Gentile majority or a Gentile minority and vice versa by an Israelite-ish majority and by an Israelite-ish minority. As of the present time, we have a Gentile majority and we have an Israelite-ish minority called by Paul the Remnant in Romans 11:5, and Galatians 6:16, the Israel of God. True Israelites, but of God, they are believing Israelites.

So when we read that they are priests of God, well, that goes all the way back to the promises that God made to the children of Israel, as they came out of Egypt, at Mount Sinai, he said that that was one of their blessings; they would be peculiar people, and they would be priests of God. Peter picks that up in 1 Peter chapter 2, and points to the believing element in his day, and refers to those passages in Exodus chapter 19, alludes to them and applies them to the body of believers today.

When some people who don't recognize this, they have trouble with 1 Peter because what he does is pick out those passages which have to do with the nation Israel as they stood at Mount Sinai and when Peter applies them to the believers in the present day, they then want to say, no, they don't apply to us because we are the Church and we don't have anything to do with Israel. No, it's as we've said so often through these weeks, I hope you've got it, I know some of you haven't because I hear you making statements that are contradictory to the things we've studied over the past year. Isn't that terrible? You know, we labor and labor and labor and I know what you're thinking. You didn't make it plain. [Laughter] Okay, all right, that's why I keep then talking about it.

But there is one people of God, but the people of God have different characteristics as the ages unfold. Gentile majority. Gentile minority. Israelite-ish majority. Israelite-ish minority. But all part of the people of God. There is no confusion

of Gentile and Israel. They are always distinct. Israel and the Gentiles are always distinct, but they have inherited the same Abrahamic promises and one of those promises was that they would be priests of God. They would be peculiar people. And, so, that's the meaning of these passages. When we talk about in the present day that we are all priests of God, we're saying the same thing that Moses was told at Mount Sinai. But, now, it's finding its fulfillment in the people of God at the present day.

Now, we call the people of God today the Church; but we're not trying to say that the Church is not connected with the saints of the Old Testament. The saints of the Old Testament became the Church on the Day of Pentecost. And so, consequently, we're talking about that body of people which flows through history in a majority or minority relationship to one another.

So "They shall be priests of God." What does that mean? We don't want to lose ourselves in how to interpret something and lose ourselves in the reference, and fail to remember that when we say that we are priests of God that means that we have access to God. That we are able to get down upon our knees, in fact, we don't even have to do that, but we are able to get down upon our knees and we are able to lift our hearts to the Lord God; and we have access to him through Christ, as part of the priesthood. We are a spiritual priesthood. Isn't it terrible that so often we don't take advantage of what we have? Have you spent some time in prayer today? Did you observe your priesthood? Did you take advantage of that? Did you have the time of communion with the Lord?

That's one of the greatest of our blessings; that we are able to enter, through Christ, cause he's the great High Priest. We enter through him, because of what he's done, and we have communion with the Lord God at any moment. What could be

greater than that? That's better than getting along with your wife or your husband or your friends.

And the third reason, he says, "They shall be priests of God and of the Messiah." And, incidentally, he uses the expression through here, which suggests the term Messiah. It has the article here and, I think, that's the force of it. "They shall be priests of God and of the Messiah, and they shall reign with Him for a thousand years." That's the third reason that the person who has part in the first resurrection is blessed and separated unto God. "He shall reign with Him for a thousand years."

Now, occasionally, people will say something like this, as I mentioned earlier, they will say, "But the term 'a thousand years' is only found in this one passage. So how can we make so much over a millennial kingdom when the term is found once?"

Well, we've tried to say, in the introduction that's true it's found once, but the idea of the kingdom is found countless times in the Bible. But think about it for a moment? It's found only in this passage. But how many times is it found in this passage? Six times, six times it is stated that "they shall rule and reign with Him," or "He is bound for a thousand years," or "after the thousand years are finished." So the term is repeated six times. How many times does God have to say something to us? Usually only two or three. But, really, it's true. It is found only here but six times here.

Now, then, I want you to notice something else. I want you to notice that in verses 4 and 5, we have vision. "I saw thrones," etcetera, etcetera, and so on. And then, verse 6, "Blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection." The vision has come to an end and John is offering an interpretive beatitude.

Now, if you know anything about apocalyptic literature, read Daniel, read the Book of Revelation, you'll find it very frequently in that kind of literature. You also find it

in the Book of Zechariah and in the 24th and 27th chapters of the Book of Isaiah, though not so clearly the point that I am speaking about. You find that it's quite common for a vision to be given and then an interpretation made of the vision. Now, that is what John is doing here. This is an interpretative beatitude.

That's why I call it, capital C, "The Interpretative Beatitude." But here is the point. The thousand years is found both in the vision and in the interpretative beatitude. In other words, we do not have any symbolic interpretation given in verse 6, and the thousand years, mentioned in verses 4 and 5. We have it in both the vision and in the interpretation. Now, that would seem to indicate, fairly strongly, that we are to take the term, a thousand years, in the vision, as being a specific thousand years.

Furthermore, to show you that we do have, now, and this is further evidence that we do have now an interpretative beatitude, notice the tense of the verb in verse 6. "But they shall be priests of God and of the Messiah, and they shall reign with Him for a thousand years." The Greek text is *basileusousin*; that's a future tense. It's translated properly. "And they shall reign with Him a thousand years." But look back at verse 4, "They lived and they reigned." Aorist tense: past time. "They lived and they reigned with Him." John, in his vision, looks at the vision and sees this as a consummated vision. But, now, in verse 6, he looks at it from the standpoint of the present time, and he says, "And they shall reign with Him for a thousand years." So the tense of the verb, itself, suggests that this is something that lies in the future and the change of tense from past to future, indicates that he has definitely moved from the vision to interpretation.

Dr. Everett Harrison, who for many years has been Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, was my New Testament professor. He's not the only one

that I've had, but when I first began to study the New Testament exegesis, I came to seminary with the knowledge of Greek and Latin and was able to translate the Bible long before I got there though I had classical Greek.

Dr. Everett Harrison, I took practically every course he ever offered. He was really about, oh, I hate to say this, I really hate to say this, he was one of the few exegetes on the faculty of this seminary. There are lots of good men there but in those days, he was one of the few exegetes and he was good. And students loved to take his classes; and I was one who did. So I took practically every course he took, majored under him, and then, I remember some of the main things that he said in class so well. I took excellent notes. I've stolen many a thought from Dr. Harrison through the years.

But Dr. Harrison was discussing this passage, and he was not the kind of person who got really excited about too much. He wasn't the kind of person who was a fiery exegete. He was just a good exegete. He just was a clear thinker. And knew Greek and knew Greek grammar and syntax. And, furthermore, his father had been an excellent preacher. He grew up in a home on a mission field as well, in China, and just had a tremendous scriptural background. And Dr. Harrison was going through this passage and when he finally came to this particular point, the interpretative beatitude, and he had discussed the pro's and con's of Revelation 20:4 through 6, and he made the point that in the first two verses, verses 4 and 5, we have vision; and then we have interpretation in verse 6. And the thousand years is found in verse 6 in the interpretation as well as in the vision; and therefore, we are to take it in the normal sense. I still remember his words. He said, "That nails it tight!" Those were his precise words. "That nails it tight!" He'd already given a number of good arguments; but when he reached that, he said, "That nails it tight!"

Well, I don't know that it nails it tight; I don't even think it's necessary. I think, it's been plain enough, as we've gone through, we didn't really need that. I would have known that whether John write verse 6, or not. But, at any rate, it's a very interesting thing. And I've noticed this; that people often overlook that fact.

So, then, to sum up what John has seen then is a vision of the saints of God. He has seen this vision after he has seen the vision of the Second Advent; after he has seen the vision of the final, cataclysmic catastrophe of the destruction of the enemies of God, in the last part of chapter 19, verse 17 through verse 21. After the binding of the saints, and he has seen the saints ruling and reigning with the Messiah for a thousand years. As we will see, he will see that interim kingdom come to an end and a final rebellion will take place. And, then, he will describe the judgment of the Great White Throne and then he sees the vision of the new heavens and of the new earth; the key points that upon which the interpretation rest are the thousand years and, specifically, the meaning of the term "lived."

I want to close with just a very familiar quotation. Anyone who has ever done exegetical work in this passage has heard this, but there is still a lot of truth in it. One must exegete the passage and solve the questions without this interpretation or without this comment. But one of the great commentators of the 19th Century was Henry Alford. Alford was an Anglican, he was a Dean, that is, he was a dean in the Anglican Church, a very fine exegete of Holy Scripture, a premillennialist. He wrote a commentary on the entire Greek New Testament. Everybody who has any library worth its salt has Alford's Greek Testament in it. And one of the nice things about that commentary, even though it's a hundred and thirty-five or so years out of date, is you have a sound interpreter with the information at hand, in his day. You have something on all of the books of the

New Testament that is worth reading. And, in some cases, it's difficult to get a good commentary on one or two, well, several of the books of the New Testament, by a sound individual.

Alford says this with reference to the fact that the term "lived" in some people's minds means in one case bodily resurrection and in another case means the new birth or he didn't know Professor Hoekema, but he could have included him living with Christ in spiritual life in heaven.

This is what he said, "If, in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned, where certain souls lived," and he uses the Greek there, in order to, so that you would understand that we are talking about the same word. He says, "Where certain *psuche ezhsan* "certain souls" live. Notice *ezhsan* that means lived. "At the first, and the rest of the *nekrwn* [or the dead], the rest of the *nekrwn ezhsan* lived only at the end of the first, if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave; the there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out." That's an interesting expression, isn't it? We used that in our day but he hit upon that back then. He says, "And Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything."

In other words, if in the same context we can use words in different senses, without any indication that they are used in different senses, you cannot communicate with people. So let me read it again. "If in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned, where certain souls lived at the first, and the rest of the dead lived only at the end of a specified period after the first, if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal

rising from the grave then there is an end of all significance in language and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything."

Well, I hope I haven't bored you too much with the exegesis of this passage. There are lots of other things that I could say, believe it or not. [Laughter] I was teaching a course at Trinity over the past five years in premillennialism, as well as teaching ecclesiology and eschatology almost every year there in addition to all the other courses, but I had for many years exegeted in the exegesis course at Dallas on the Book of Revelation. Every other year I taught Revelation; I taught it probably about twenty times through the Greek text. And, so, it became a book in which I was very much interested; even if I didn't fully understand everything in it, but it's something that I've enjoyed.

But in the last five years, I even went back and went into detail again, particularly with Professor Hoekema in mind because Professor Hoekema had written a very substantial book in criticism of premillennialism. He also has some very wise things to say about the excesses of dispensationalism, many of which I would have to say I agree with. But, as far as amillennialism is concerned, I don't really believe that it stands the test of exegetical study. Now, don't misunderstand me, there are some passage that are very, very difficult. I still study some of them. And one or two that I don't yet have the answer to. I could say, well, the apostles didn't really agree among themselves. That would get us out of a lot of difficulty. In which case, I would say, "I follow John. I understand him," because he is one who has made it so plain in this passage. In fact, this is the plainest of all of the passages, it seems to me.

Now, as I say, there are many things that I don't fully understand and you can come up and ask me some questions and I won't be able to answer them. I may try to

fool you, if you are a neophyte and because, after all, I've been teaching at a theological seminary for forty years, you know lots of tricks. You make students think you really know; when you don't know. That's not hard, providing they are beginning in theological study. But, at any rate, you understand what, I think, about this passage.

Now, we do have a couple of difficult things that are coming up. I don't know whether it's going to be worthwhile to do with verses 7 through 10, since nobody understands those verses too well. Whether amillennial, postmillennial, or premillennial or whatever, but I probably will attempt to go ahead and handle them since they probably form part of our program.

We're nearing the end of our series of studies now. We've been, as I say, about thirty-five studies or so, I haven't counted but I believe it's about that, even though this says at the top of the page, lecture thirty-two, I had John Moss destroy a couple of lectures because I made a couple of comments I didn't want to have on tape since they really didn't reflect what I really thought about the passage. So we've been at least thirty-four lectures and, I think, probably a little bit more and that's long enough for any particular series. So we'll probably do two or three more and then we will come to the end of our study.

It's 8:30, let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the word of God and we thank Thee for these great passages. We acknowledge we don't understand everything about them. We don't want to give that impression. We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt continue to teach us and instruct us in Thy word; and help us to remember, for all of us, that it's not our position that we want to defend or that we should desire to defend but

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rather to know the truth. Give us understanding. Help us to ponder the truth, reflect upon it and be submissive to the teaching of the Triune God in the Spirit.

For Christ's sake. Amen.