

THINGS HARD TO UNDERSTAND

The Apostle Peter states concerning Paul's writings: "he speaks of some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of Scriptures, to their own destruction" (II Pet. 3:16). Admittedly there are many passages of Scripture that are hard to understand, especially if they are given only a causal reading, however, Peter does not say they cannot be understood. God revealed to Moses that "Secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). We read in I Corinthians 2:12 "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, that we might know the things freely given us by God." We are commanded "Do not be foolish, but *understand* what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17).

Do we dare consider Biblical passages that are "hard to understand"? Mark Twain is supposed to have said "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me, it's the parts I do understand." Whether he said it or not, this is a common reaction to the Bible. Why consider those parts that Peter says, "are hard to understand?" Consider this: they are a part of God's Word and must have been written for a purpose; and note that Peter equates them with "the rest of Scripture." If we consider them, it might keep the "untaught and unstable" from "distorting them to their own destruction."

First let's consider: SONS OF GOD, FALLEN ANGELS, AND JESUS PREACHING TO SPIRITS IN PRISON.

Genesis 6:1,2,4: "Now it came about when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose...The Nephilim (giants) were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men of old, men of renown."

Jude 6, 7: "And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire."

II Peter 2:4: "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (*tartarus*) and committed them in pits of darkness reserved for judgment."

I Peter 3:18-20: Christ "having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit, in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark..."

When angels appear on earth they always appear as men. These

"kept not their own domain but abandoned their proper abode" (Jude 6). Jude compares their sin to that of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they *in the same way* as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh." The result of this unholy alliance was "the Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were mighty men of old, men of renown" (Gen. 6:4). Does this not contradict the Bible because Jesus said that "in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but *are like the angels in heaven?*" (Matt. 22:30). Note: Jesus said the "angels in heaven." Genesis along with Peter and Jude is speaking of angels who "left their own domain and abandoned their proper abode." The opposing view is that "the sons of God" were simply godly descendants of Seth, and the "daughters of men" were ungodly descendants of Cain who inter-married. My question is: were there no "daughters of God" among the descendants of Seth, and were there no "sons of God" among the descendants of Cain? Merrill F. Unger in his book *Biblical Demonology* states: "The general interpretation that refers the 'sons of God' to pious Sethites, and the 'daughters of men' to un-godly Cainites while naïve and perfectly orthodox in that it enunciates a simple spiritual principal and assuredly avoids certain obvious difficulties too which a more virile exposition exposes itself, yet is found to be manifestly weak and unconvincing in satisfying the evident breadth and scope of the passage." The logical conclusion is that the angels that sinned, spoken of by Peter and Jude, described in Genesis 6, are the "sons of God." That the title "sons of God" referred to angels in the Old Testament is seen in the book of Job. "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan was among them...When the morning stars sang together, all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 1:6, 38:7). All other fallen angels are the demons loose upon the earth and are under the kingship of Satan.

Jude writes about the same rebellion of angels as Peter and Genesis. Sometime during the time of Noah, angels "left their own habitation" and went after "strange flesh," after the daughters of men. The result? They are now "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for judgment of the great day." Before we say this is not important, consider I Corinthians 6:2, 3: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world...Do you not know that we shall judge *angels?*" The Corinthians did not know this, and neither does the average Christian in the modern church know, or have any interest in knowing, they will judge angels. The promise that the saints will share Christ's rule and judgment is one that occurs frequently in Scripture.

The "eternal bonds under darkness" and the "pits of darkness" where these angels are committed is a place called "*tartarus*," translated "hell" in the English Bibles. However, this is the only place in the New Testament the Greek word "*tartarus*" is found. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* defines it as: "the name of a subterranean region, doleful and dark." Peter calls it "pits of darkness" (II Pet. 2:4). This is the prison of the fallen angels, or spirits, to which Jesus went and made proclamation (I Pet. 3:19). He specifies they were "disobedient in the days of Noah." This is definitely a reference to Genesis 6. Jesus did not preach the

gospel to them, rather the proclamation of his resurrection victory to fallen angelic beings. We are not told what Jesus did during the forty days between his resurrection and ascension. It was not while his body was in the tomb because he had “given up his spirit” (Jn. 19:30), and the spirit returns to the God who gave it (Ecc. 12:7). When we read I Peter 3:19 that Jesus went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison, we should not read into it dead people living in prison, without resurrection, and Jesus going to them to preach the good news. The word *spirits* in the Bible is never used to describe people, only angels and demons. It is not about dead people (who exist outside the body) but about spirits, angelic beings in prison, in Tartarus, bound in everlasting chains of darkness because of what they did in the days of Noah, leaving their own habitation, giving themselves over to fornication and going after “strange flesh, the daughters of men.” Their offspring were the Nephilim on the earth.

THE MILLENNIUM: REVELATION 20:2-6

The word *millennium* means 1,000 years, *millennial reign* refers to 1,000 years of the reign of Christ upon the earth. Revelation 20 is the only place in Scripture the thousand-year reign of Christ is mentioned, yet this passage has become, to prophesy experts, the basis for interpreting the remaining passages of prophesy in the entire Bible. There are basically three millennial views:

Pre-millennial: This view holds that Christ will return personally to initiate his kingdom; that the righteous dead will be raised who will reign with him on earth for a thousand years. Subsequent to his reign there will be a final rebellion that shall be immediately suppressed, the wicked dead will be judged, the eternal state will begin. “Pre” simply means Christ will return before the millennial takes place. Tied with this view are the many theories of the “rapture” and the “great tribulation.” There are arguments as to when the rapture will take place; will it be before or after the “great tribulation.”

Post-millennial: This view holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended through Christian teaching and preaching. This will cause the world to be Christianized resulting in a long period of peace and prosperity called the Millennium. The new age will not be essentially different from the present. It emerges as an increasing proportion of the world’s inhabitants are converted to Christ. Evil is not eliminated, but will be reduced to a minimum as the moral and spiritual influence of Christians is heightened. The church will assume greater importance and many social, economic and educational problems will be solved. This period closes with the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and final judgment.

A-millennial: This view does not hold that the Bible predicts a period of universal peace and righteousness before the end. They believe there will be a continuous growth of good and evil in the world which will culminate in the second coming of Christ when the dead shall be raised, and the final judgment held. This view says the kingdom of God is now present in the world as the victorious Christ is ruling by the word and Spirit, though they also look forward to a future glorious and perfect kingdom on the new earth in the life to come. A-millennialist interpret the millennium in Revelation 20 as describing the present reign of the souls of the deceased believers with Christ in heaven.

Since the first century we have seen many disagreements. How will Christ return? When will he return? What sort of kingdom will he establish? These questions persist today.

We will examine Revelation 20:4-6 since this is the only place the millennium is mentioned.

Verse 4: thrones, judgment given: Who are the “they?” white garments=priests. Crowns=kings (1:6; 5:10). Christians are a royal priesthood (I Pet. 2:9), wearing crowns (2:10, 3:11). They possess authority over the nations (2:26, 27), they are seated with Christ on his throne (3:20; Eph. 2:6), and they are standing with the Lamb on Mt. Zion, having been purchased from among men (14:1, 2). “Judgment is given to them.” Before Christ’s victory over Satan, God’s people were judged and ruled over by heathen nations because Adam had abdicated his position of judgment and surrendered it to Satan. It doesn’t make sense for Christ to destroy the rule of Satan and regain for man the rulership of the earth and not give it to him before he returns.

John further tells us who these elders represent: “The souls beheaded” and “those not worshiping the beast nor received his mark. “They came to life and reigned a thousand years.” This does not mean the bodily resurrection of the just. They “came to life” and “have part in the first resurrection” (ver.6). What about the 1,000 years? We use the number to exaggerate: “I’ve told you a thousand times.” When Scripture uses the term, it is not to exaggerate, rather simply to express a great vastness. “God owns the cattle on the thousand hills (Ps. 50:10). Does hill 1,001 belong to someone else? God owns all the cattle on all the hills. 1,000 indicates there are many hills and much cattle (Duet. 1:11, 7:9). Just how many years? Just how many hills in Psalm 50? The 1,000-year reign of Christ started at his ascension (Eph.1:20) and will end when he delivers the kingdom up to the Father (I Cor. 15:24-28).

Verse 5, 6: The first part of verse 5 is a parenthetical statement about those excluded from the privilege of living and reigning with Christ, that is, the unfaithful. The last part of the verse “This is the first resurrection” connects with the last statement in verse 4: “they came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” What is the first resurrection? Before the final resurrection there is another, a first resurrection, the resurrection of Christ, “the first fruits of those who are asleep” (I Cor. 15:20). John does not say the believer himself is resurrected but “has part in the first resurrection.” He shares the resurrection of Christ (Col 2:12; Rom. 6:5) we are “raised up with him.” Christ’s resurrection is the definitive resurrection, the first resurrection. We participate through covenantal baptism (Rom. 6:4; Col. 3:1). Now connect 5b “This is the first resurrection” with 4c “they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” “the rest of the dead,” simply a phrase excluding them from the reign.

Conclusion: The New Testament teaches a general resurrection of both the just and the unjust (John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15). The reign of Christ began at the ascension (Eph. 1:19-23), and will end when he delivers up the kingdom to God the Father and all things will be subjected to Him. (I Cor 15:25-28). Jesus has inaugurated the age of the resurrection...all who believe are participating. The church, his body, has been given power and dominion to reign (Dan 7:18; 27). In the last hour, all who are in the tombs will come to life. This is at his appearing (Jn. 6:38-51; I Thess. 4:14-17). Our being baptized is even more properly resurrection than the resurrection of the body. Transformation, not resuscitation is the important feature of resurrection. We take part now in “Christ’s resurrection.” What more could the popular conception of the millennium give us that we do not already possess? We have all we need to live the life God wants us to live. (Hard things to understand continued next month)