

## LITERAL INTERPRETATION

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The insistence of some for a literal interpretation of **Revelation 20** is the very heart of premillennialism. The major “proof text” of this fallacious system of doctrines is **Revelation 20**. In this key chapter they find taught the literal, earthly reign of Christ from literal Jerusalem on David’s literal throne for a literal thousand years. Essential to the sustaining of such a conception is a literal interpretation of all prophecy, particularly in **Revelation 20**.

Richard D Haan, one of the prominent preachers of premillennialism today, emphasizes the importance of such an approach to the interpretation of Scripture in *How to Study the Bible* by stating:

Literary Interpretation is a basic principle of Bible study, and maintains that **every** passage must be taken to mean exactly what it says **unless** context or the expression itself indicates otherwise (15 – emphasis LK).

Brother Charles M. Neal wrote In *Light in a Dark Place*, “Expect a literal fulfillment. This is God’s way of fulfilling prophecy,” Noting the importance of literal Interpretation, consider now this statement by Hal Lindsey in *There’s A New World Coming*:

But as I study the Scriptures and consider the various views on this question, I’m convinced that the most important issue at stake is that of consistency In Bible interpretation (269).

The taproot of premillennialism is the belief in the persistent, consistent use of literal interpretation for all Scripture. Premillennialism lives or dies on that one point. Premillennialists accuse amillennialists of “spiritualizing” prophecies of the kingdom to avoid acceptance of the future reign of Christ on earth. Premillennialists maintain that they are the only ones who are consistent in their approach to Scripture, and the approach to be used is literal interpretation.

Actual application of this principle will reveal the true worth and nature of premillennialism. A few illustrations (and there are many) from Hal Lindsey’s *There’s A New World Coming*, a commentary on Revelation, will suffice. Note his consistency. The Beast of **Revelation 13** according to Lindsey is the “Antichrist,” “a ruthless, unfeeling dictator.” The sea from which the Beast comes is “the nations of the world.” The “ten horns picture ten nations that will form a confederacy which the Beast will rule.” (According to Lindsey, this refers to the European Common Market.) The leopard, bear, and lion, according to Lindsey are references to the Greek, Medo-Persian and Babylonian empires. Lindsey interprets the mark of the beast in **Revelation 13** with these words:

Since the number six in the Bible stands for humanity, I believe the meaning of 666 is man trying to imitate the trinity of God (three sixes in one person).

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What is there about the context or these expressions themselves which would indicate the necessity of a non-literal interpretation that is not also true about the context or expressions in **Revelation 20**? Why, for example, is “THE THOUSAND YEARS” of **Revelation 20** literal and “THE BEAST” of Revelation 13 not literal? How can the rule of literal interpretation be applied consistently when the “SEA” of **Revelation 13** symbolizes “the nations of the world” and “THE THOUSAND YEARS” of **Revelation 20** is said to be exactly, literally understood?

The truth is that the book of Revelation is filled with symbols. John began the book by stating how the message was received. The message was “SIGNIFIED...BY HIS ANGEL UNTO HIS SERVANT JOHN” (1:1). The message was delivered, therefore, in coded, or symbolic, language to John. That includes not only **Revelation 13** and **20**, but also the entire book. To put forth a doctrine supposedly obtainable only through consistent, literal interpretation of Scripture, and then to apply that very rule arbitrarily is to manifest the foolishness of the doctrine and to brand as false teachers those who promote such heresy. They obviously wrest the Scriptures “UNTO THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION” (**2 Peter 3:16**).

The deathblow to the whole system of premillennialism is the obvious inconsistency of its promoters as they attempt to elaborate on this contrived doctrine which resulted from violating **Revelation 20** with the rule of literal interpretation. The “literal rifle” is also applied in **Revelation 20** by premillennialists only to the parts of the chapter they choose in order to defend their theories.

Certainly, an important issue “at stake is that of consistency in Bible Interpretation.” Lindsey is condemned by his own words, and so his doctrine.