

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 43 - Chapters 19 and 20

This is the 4th week that we have been dealing with Revelation chapter 19 because there is so much here to examine and to learn from. The good news is that we'll finally finish with it today and move on to chapter 20! Remember that chapter 19 revolves around what is taking place mostly in Heaven, and so mostly in the spiritual sphere. And what is taking place is a noisy and joyous celebration over the final demise of Babylon the Great.

We discussed in previous lessons that Babylon is representative of all that is evil and opposed to God on earth. And that while Babylon the Great is real and physical, it represents multiple entities that together form a kind of system, and it is also a spirit that has been alive and passed down generation to generation; thus it has appeared in one form or another throughout human history since Adam and Eve fell and sin entered the world. This means that elements of Babylon existed in Christ's day (and before), it exists in our day, and it will exist at its ultimate influence and wickedness in the End Times. Therefore the prophets of old wrote about her long before John was given his incredible visions of the future.

I found one of the most descriptive and riveting narratives about Babylon in an unlikely place: the tiny Book of Jude in the New Testament. It is worth our while to read it, but as we do I will tell you in advance that although we will not find the word "Babylon" there, the description is unmistakable especially since we have studied about Babylon in Revelation for so long. And it is also worth mentioning that this book was written prior to John receiving his apocalyptic visions; so without the benefit of John's visions what we find is that Jude is telling us about what was happening in his day along with what the Lord has inspired him to write about the future. You're also going to recognize much of what he is speaking about as being active in our time.

READ JUDE 1 all

I want to draw your attention to the several statements Jude made about some within the Messianic faith movement of his day that are people who cause divisions; those, who despite their claims of righteousness and even salvation, follow their own ways, grumble and complain, and have no understanding of the truth. They join in the religious festivals, share communal meals with their brothers and sisters of the faith, but they bear no actual brotherly love and care only about themselves. Jude compares them to waterless clouds and trees without fruit. That is, despite their pleasant appearance and their professions of faith they are useless and their behaviors exhibit none of the expected responses to their salvation. Even worse, they can pollute the congregation of the faithful. Why? Because they don't have the Spirit.

After speaking about this issue as it was in his day in the first several verses, Jude transitions to talking about an indefinite future in verse 18. He says that if we are part of such a fellowship like he describes (whether in his time or in the future) then this is what we are to do:

CJB Jude 1:22-23 ²² ***Rebuke some who are disputing;*** ²³ ***save others, snatching them out of the fire; and to yet others, show mercy, but with fear, hating even the clothes stained by their vices.***

Let me say this in modern, everyday terms. For those within your community of fellowship who want to argue and dispute, to ensnare others into their deceived way of thinking, and to divide the congregation, don't put up with it. Rebuke them; put them on notice that it will not be tolerated. The hope is that they repent; but if they don't, then show them the door. But as James, Jude's brother, also said, in other cases try to save the wrong minded person among you from the wrong paths they have begun to head down. Jude says to try to snatch them out of the fire; James says that to turn a wandering brother from his destructive path will save him from death and cover many sins. And finally, in yet other cases, it is right to show mercy to some who have gone off the divine reservation; but, be very careful and don't become so tolerant (or naive) as to join them thinking that by getting closer to them by showing a level of acceptance or rationalization of their behavior that this will win them back. We are to hate their vices and make it clear that we do.

On the other hand, one chapter back in Revelation 18, we hear the Lord telling His people on earth to "Come out of her!" Here's the point: the spirit of Babylon has been alive and infecting God's people since long before Christ was born. It is not something new nor is it something that we are to put up with, tolerate, or believe that we have the power to change it. It is one thing to belong to a congregation with a person or two in it who carry that spirit of Babylon in them because they can be, and must be, dealt with to purge that congregation of the dangers these few scoffers present. It is quite another when the leadership of the congregation, and the entire essence of the congregation (if not its very charter), represents the spirit of Babylon. In that case we are to flee that organization and completely detach ourselves from it. These are not instructions meant only for the people of the End Times, because such people and such congregations and organizations have always existed; they span the ages.

In Revelation God is judging Babylon so harshly, and the residents of Heaven are rejoicing so excitedly, because Babylon had not only murdered true worshippers of God but also caused many more to fall away from a true faith and accept lies that have led millions, if not billions, into eternal death. The spirit of Babylon remains alive within many of our Jewish and Christian institutions and we must be on the alert to recognize them. And when we do, we must take the appropriate actions that have been prescribed in the Bible no matter how difficult or uncomfortable they might be. Our eternal futures hang in the balance.

When we left off last time Yeshua had mounted a white horse and was leading a heavenly army also riding on white horses. The white horses represent absolute purity; but the purpose of their heavenly riders is to make war. This is a day of judgment. Those who are saved in Christ will be spared; those who are not will be killed. But what is terrifying to contemplate is that the era of being saved by trust in Christ will be over for a time. The era that we are still living in (thank you Lord!) whereby we can recognize our sinful condition, repent, and seek forgiveness in Yeshua, will have come to an end. The full number of those who will be saved will have been achieved and there will be no further opportunity to join the ranks of those who have been shown God's mercy until later after Armageddon.

Christ has traded in His cross for a sword. He will come again but not to sacrifice Himself as God's lamb; rather it will be to carry out the Father's judgment as a ruthless lion. The blood on His robe will not be His own; it will be the blood of countless sinners who refused, earlier, to avail themselves of the free gift of forgiveness and mercy. And when He has finished that task, and is seated on His earthly throne, verse 15 says that He will rule God's Kingdom with an iron rod. A rod is another word for a scepter. An **iron** rod is symbolic of the unbending rule of law, overseen by an unbending King. Messiah will rule righteously, in love, but sternly and without tolerance for sin. And what set of laws will He rule by? The only God given set that has ever existed and ever been handed down: the Torah. The Law of Moses. Think not?

CJB Matthew 5:17-18 ¹⁷ "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. ¹⁸ Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah-not until everything that must happen has happened.

When does the Torah pass away? ONLY when the current heaven and earth pass away. And we are but 2 chapters from being told of the very moment that the current heaven and earth actually do pass away, and therefore of the moment when the Torah is retired.

CJB Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer there.

The war that Jesus is galloping to fight, and the throne that He is about to occupy will not exist on a new earth; rather it will exist on this present earth as we know it today. The Millennial Kingdom (as some call it) that He will reign over will exist on the present earth as we know it today. It is at the end of the Millennial Kingdom period (a 1000 year era) that the earth and the heavens will be re-created.... reformed and remade... and this is the part of Revelation that I'm so anxious to get to so that we can talk about it at length. I tell you from the heart, it is no fun to spend so much time talking to you about judgment, destruction, and death. But the glorious light at the end of the tunnel is beginning to appear.

Let's re-read a small portion of Revelation 19 to get it all fresh in our minds.

RE-READ REVELATION 19:15 - end

Notice in verse 15 the emphasis that it is the returning Christ who is the instrument of the furious rage of God. And who He is will not be disputed among humanity because on His thigh is written the words: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. I can only imagine what so many of the un-saved on this earth will think when they see Him in all His glory. The myriads who in terror will cry out: "OK, I can no longer deny it; now I believe!", moments before their physical deaths that will also lead to their eternal deaths. Christ's rule on earth is being established.

The carcasses of the countless dead will be defiled and treated as no more than garbage because in verse 17 an angel who flies about in the mid-heaven calls the unclean scavenger birds to a great feast that God is providing for them. This is, of course, to be contrasted with the wedding feast of the Lamb. Several lessons ago we discussed how the ancients viewed

the structure of our planet and the cosmos. And without going over it all again, I'll just point out that it was thought that the birds as well as the stars and the sun and the moon all occupied the same space, and this space was called mid-heaven. So when we hear of an angel in mid-heaven calling out to all the birds to come and ready themselves to feast on the decaying flesh of the wicked, then the mental picture was of this angel hovering at the zenith of the sky so that all that was below him could see him and hear him. Of course this structure of earth and the heavens was only ancient myth; but it was nearly universally believed without question so that is how it is described here by John.

It is fascinating how the Bible does not tend to indulge itself with graphic war details as is usually found in extra-biblical literary works and that's because the Bible doesn't share the same objective as those other works. What is important is not the strategy and the battle plans and the tales of great heroes but rather of the triumph of good over evil. The list of those bodies the birds are feasting on is intended to show us how all inclusive it is and of the supreme finality involved. It includes every class of people without exception: government leaders, military leaders, aristocrats, even their animals. All kinds of common people, whether slaves or free men, regardless of their wealth or status are among the dead. And this is because non-Believers and remorseless idolaters are found in every society, every culture, of every race and ethnic group, at every level of wealth or poverty, in every corner of the earth. Christ will spare none of them and the birds will not bypass any of them in their feasting. Despite this gruesome scene, while it represents the final insult and offense to the dead (not getting a proper burial was a horror to ancient Hebrews) it also is necessary for these birds to do their grisly jobs because otherwise the survivors (all Believers) would have to spend a great deal of time burying millions and millions of corpses. The disease that would result from so much rotting flesh laying exposed would be inevitable..... remember..... all this is going to be happening on this present earth that will be horribly war torn and still suffering from the many calamities that the Lord has sent upon it. So planet earth will be anything but a paradise in the first few years of Christ's reign.

Verse 19 speaks of the Beast and the kings of the earth.... that is, the leaders of nations.... coming with their armies to do battle against Christ and His army. That the previous verse has an angel calling the scavenger birds to a feast is essentially giving away the results of this battle before it happens. That is, the defeat of the nations is assured. A question often asked in Christian circles is: who will be doing the fighting? While for certain the opposition will be human armies, that will not be the case with Christ's army. Nothing here implies that the still-alive Believers living on earth will be joining the battle. However, here is my speculation about this. I do think that earlier passages tell us that indeed Believers.... and especially Believers in Israel.... including a large number of believing Jews.... will gather and prepare to do battle against the Anti-Christ and his forces, knowing that they will be outnumbered perhaps 1000 to 1. After all, this is going to take place in the Jezreel Valley in Israel and Believers will know God's Word and what is to take place. However, while both sides are envisioning a geopolitical battle of human armies (that the circumstance seems to demand), Christ and those angels (and perhaps souls of the righteous dead in Heaven) will come and supernaturally intervene to make the battle a short one. We don't read of any protracted fighting, not even of any Believers dying as God's earthly soldiers.

We should not neglect what Ezekiel has to say about what seems to be the same event. And as you'll soon hear, this is where Gog and Magog come in as part of the many nations coming to battle at Armageddon. Open your Bibles to Ezekiel 39.

READ EZEKIEL 39:1 - 22

Since Ezekiel was part of the Babylonian exile of the 6th century B.C., and since the next exile that Israel would face is the Roman exile in the 1st century A.D., then clearly this battle with Gog and Magog has yet to take place and is still future to us. About the only place I can fit this scene in Ezekiel 39 is at Armageddon. What I want you to notice is that Gog and Magog believe they're coming to fight Israel. That is, they're not thinking that they are going to be fighting a supernatural army of ghost-like souls of departed Believers and of angels but rather of flesh and blood soldiers. Similar to Revelation, the enemy Gog and Magog come, they are defeated (but with no explanation of the battle) with every last one of them killed, and then the birds come to eat the flesh of the millions of corpses.

So the role that Israel seems to be playing in this battle is about what happens afterward. There is no mention of some glorious or improbable victory by Israeli soldiers. The remnant of Israel (that I claim are all Believing Jews) merely goes out to gather up the weapons of war abandoned by the now completely wiped out armies of the nations and uses them for fuel for 7 years. And of course we find very similar wording in Ezekiel 39 as we find in Revelation 19 about scavenger birds being gathered to have a great feast on the flesh of the enemy; a feast that God calls a "sacrifice".

Interestingly in Revelation 19 the Beast was not killed but rather taken captive, as was the False Prophet. We are told that it is was the False Prophet who had done the miracles that had deceived so many people into taking the mark (666) of his boss, the Beast, onto their bodies as a symbol of their allegiance to him (although because these people were deceived they no doubt thought what they were doing was good). And, says the verse, this False Prophet influenced those he led to "worship" the image of the Beast. Worship is strictly an activity that takes place in the religious sphere. Therefore the worldwide church of Babylon (my name for it), taken over by the False Prophet after Babylon's demise, became a tool in Satan's hand. Those thinking they were Believers and God worshippers of course accepted supernatural miracles. And when this charismatic leader brings about these miracles at his command then millions of the former worldwide church of Babylon, that is now the worldwide church of the False Prophet, will naturally follow his every edict. I promise you, they would NOT do that if they knew the Word of God. But fellow Believers, for centuries a goodly portion of the Church has either discarded entirely the first part of the Bible that makes proper interpretation of the second part possible, or they set the Bible aside in favor of manmade doctrines that sound good and promote certain agendas, or (as is happening in our day) they question the veracity of the Bible on the grounds that it is much too old and primitive to be taken seriously in modern times. So a kind of humanized and tolerant Christian philosophy replaces what God's holy Word actually teaches and commands us.

Chapter 19 ends with the Beast and the False Prophet thrown into the Lake of Fire. There is a theological debate that has gone on for centuries about what the result of being thrown into the

Lake of Fire is. One side says that it is the complete annihilation of the physical and spiritual essence of a person. The other side says that this means that the Beast and the False Prophet were thrown into a place of eternal torments of their souls. I must say that there is pretty good argument for this second position because as we'll soon read in Revelation 20:

CJB Revelation 20:10 ¹⁰ *The Adversary who had deceived them was hurled into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

This statement seems rather conclusive that the Lake of Fire is more or less what Christianity calls Hell. And that the souls of the wicked dead that are imprisoned there are not destroyed but rather live in that nightmarish state eternally. Frankly, the major reason the first suggestion that souls are completely annihilated in the Lake of Fire even remains as part of the debate is the theological position that a benevolent and loving God would never allow a person's soul..... not even the most wicked of persons..... to suffer eternally. But as we see over and over again, church doctrines often have little to do with what the Holy Scriptures actually say and they remold the character and nature of God into their own image. Rather these doctrines often merely fulfill a person or a group's wishes about how something, or even God, should be in their eyes.

Finally notice verse 21 that says how all the soldiers of the Beast's armies died; it was by means of the sword that goes out of the mouth of the rider of the horse. As we discussed last time, this sword is not a military implement of war, but it can kill. Rather the sword is symbolic of the Word of God that divides, elects, and separates and sends some to everlasting life with Him, and the remainder to everlasting darkness and death. Point being that while Gog, Magog, and all the armies of the Beast came expecting to fight a human enemy whom they believed could be easily overwhelmed, they were actually confronted by God. The battle was brief and gruesome as Heaven's forces supernaturally obliterated the evil army and the only prisoners taken were the Beast and the False Prophet; all others were killed on the spot.

The final words of Revelation 19 are: and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. God has seen fit to emphasize this matter of the dead soldiers being eaten by scavenger birds because not even in death were these unrepentant sinners and enemies of God shown the most meager of divine mercies such as an honorable burial. Let's move on to Revelation chapter 20.

READ REVELATION CHAPTER 20 all

As Charles Feinberg characterizes it, chapter 20 is the Continental Divide of Scripture. The reason is that depending on how one interprets these passages, one will either accept the notion of a 1000 year reign of Christ over a literal and physical Kingdom of God on earth (this is the Pre-millennial position) or that there is no actual 1000 year reign of Christ or physical Kingdom of God on earth (this is the Amillennial position). For them, Satan was bound up by Christ before He ascended to Heaven, and so to this day Satan has had no influence on earth and thus no influence on the Church. A third Millennial position called Post-Millennialism argues that as the Church age nears its close the Millennial era begins, and when Christ

comes it signals the end of the Millennial era as opposed to its inauguration.

The Amillennial position requires one to heavily allegorize and in some cases ignore Old Testament prophecy. What we call the Pre-millennial view was generally that of the Earliest Church Fathers and incorporated the Jewish viewpoint. Only after the Church became thoroughly gentile and everything Jewish was rejected was this Pre-millennial view also rejected. It was Augustine who first argued against it and spiritualized that which otherwise is literal and physical. In my view the Post-Millennial position defies a straightforward reading of the pertinent Bible passages and employs a nearly purely allegorical approach of interpretation. Therefore I will be speaking to you from the Pre-Millennial position in the respect that the Bible clearly calls for a literal, physical 1000 year Kingdom of God on this present earth that begins once Christ literally returns. However that by no way means that I accept Dispensationalism or any of the several Pre-Millennial doctrines championed by various denominations that includes certain timelines of events, the replacement of Israel by the gentile Church, and definitions of some important Scriptural terms that I think can be quite off the mark.

The foundational context upon which this chapter can be properly interpreted is this: here we find the inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom made possible by God Himself subduing Satan's power and activities on earth. No longer can the Adversary deceive the nations and no longer does he have wicked henchmen to do his bidding. The congregation of Believers that upon the inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom accounts for all humanity left alive on this planet is no longer in mortal danger from the enemy who wants to wipe us out.

Another important element of chapter 20 and the Millennial Kingdom is that it is distinct and separate from what occurs in chapter 21, which tells us of the advent of a new heaven and earth; or as some might think of it a re-creation of the current heaven and earth. I have read the works of some Bible commentators who conflate the Millennial Kingdom with the new heaven and earth. I cannot agree with this on a number of levels especially because it conflicts with Ezekiel's prophecies. Without some severe twisting of words and re-ordering of biblical events, it seems evident to me that the end of Millennial Kingdom (which exists for a finite period of 1000 years) also marks the beginning of a totally new heaven and earth (which exists for an infinite and eternal period).

We'll begin to tackle chapter 20 next time.