

### BOOK OF REVELATION

#### Lesson 44 - Chapter 20

We have come a long way in the Book of Revelation and we should pause to remember our journey because each milestone had its own message and purpose, and yet they all work together to guide us to the end of history and beyond. We began with the 7 letters to the 7 Believing congregations in Asia. While the Apostle John wrote and sent these letters, his opening words of chapter 1 make it clear that it was God who showed him what was to be said. Each letter was essentially a divine spiritual evaluation of each one of the 7 congregations; some did well, some received failing grades. Some received commendations, others were admonished with grave warnings for those particular assemblies of Believers to repent and change their ways or they may even have their salvation history reversed.

Why did God have John go through this exercise? It was as preparation for those congregations, and perhaps even more so for us, for the future events depicted by the chapters that followed..... God's wrath poured out upon humanity..... the destruction of the world Babylon system..... and bringing **everyone** under His judgment..... **all** will be based on Yehoveh's spiritual evaluation of us both corporately and as individuals. Are we meeting His standards? Are we doing the work He has assigned us to do? Have we yoked ourselves to a Godly congregation or to a corrupted and deceived one? While the 7 letters dealt mostly with the Believing congregations corporately, nonetheless certain individuals were at times called out as exemplary examples and other individuals were identified as the leading culprits of disobedience if not outright rebellion. But the congregational leadership tolerating those culprits, and allowing them to continue on without rebuke or even being allowed to remain in that congregation, was in God's eyes a failure of leadership and even a tacit approval of their wrong behavior.

After the warnings to Believers, we saw the Lamb of God in Heaven spring into action to inaugurate the final stage of the long awaited redemption process. Only He was worthy to open a mysterious scroll handed to Him by God the Father. The opening of this scroll revealed the first 7 of a series of 21 judgments upon humanity so that history as we know it would receive a firm shove towards its end and a new era under the Lamb's reign might begin.

We saw the Lord set aside and seal for protection 144,000 Believing Israelites to act as witnesses for Him on earth. All the while these 21 judgments were being carried out the Revelation narratives would occasionally pause to show us that despite the misery and suffering on earth, and the wicked cursing God for their distress, the residents of Heaven were joyful and praising God for what He doing. So we see the connection between the Heavenly spiritual sphere and the Earthly physical sphere, but also the vastly different perspectives and reactions of the residents of each sphere as the judgments played out.

We read that God even loosed the terrible power of demons upon mankind by opening the pit (the Abyss) into which they had long been imprisoned. So God allowed the power of Satan to

torment the people of earth, almost all of whom were at this time wicked people. Because I believe that the Scriptures make it clear that prior to God pouring out His wrath, true Believers will be spirited away (in soul, not in body) to a safe place..... no doubt that is Heaven.... then the only Believers that will be suffering under God's wrath are those who, at the moment of the Rapture, were not yet Believers. As with the title of that famous book series, they were left behind. But I also have no doubt (and I think Scripture makes it abundantly clear) that the Rapture itself will cause countless devastated non-Believers to reconsider and come to a saving faith in the God of Israel and His Son Yeshua whom they had denied until these astonishing events. All during the period of God's furious wrath and the reign of the Anti-Christ, new Believers will be made every day. However they will not be as fortunate or protected as those Believers who trusted Christ prior to the Rapture; these newest Believers will suffer through the same horrors and calamities as the wicked, and many thousands of them will die from their effects and thousands more will be martyred for their faith.

Then, as prophesied, we read of the Lamb standing on Mt. Zion along with those 144,000 witnesses..... accompanied with a huge ovation from Heaven..... proclaiming the Good News to every last person on earth so that none would have any excuse whatsoever for continuing in their rebellion. Next the evil world system of commerce and religion embodied by the spirit of Babylon was destroyed. Interestingly enough it was not that God directly or supernaturally annihilated it; it is that the Beast (the Anti-Christ) recruited 10 kings (represented by the 10 horns of the Beast) to destroy wicked Babylon. So in Revelation we read not only of the destructive power of God upon the wicked, but also of the self-destructive power of Satan and his henchmen harnessed by the Lord to achieve His purposes.

Next, in chapter 18, as the end of history is only months or weeks away, God pleads with those who claim allegiance to Him to "come out of her, My people". This is directed at the religious part of the Babylon system, where so many deceived people think they are serving God as His followers but in fact are slaves to the Evil One. It is a call to detach and leave behind the agendas and doctrines of men that in no way agree with God's Word. It is a warning to flee the Judeo-Christian religious institutions that pretend to have a measure of Godliness but in fact are self-serving and void of understanding. It is the same warning that was given to the residents of Sodom..... some being professing God worshippers..... before they and their city were liquidated by the righteous anger of the Lord Most High.

Then we saw the Heavens open and here comes Messiah as the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, anxious to finish what the Father ordained. He leads an enormous army from Heaven to face the nations at the Battle of Armageddon. His purpose is no longer to save but to destroy. The battle is short and sweet; the good guys win in a rout. Evil, at least for the time being, has been defeated. The Millennial reign of Christ over God's Kingdom has begun. And this brings us to what we'll study today: Revelation chapter 20 as God deals with Satan, the one who started this fight in the first place.

### **RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 20 all**

One of the larger questions that must be answered to begin this chapter is this: do the events we're reading about occur immediately following the events that conclude chapter 19? Or,

when we read the opening words of chapter 20, which are "next I saw", are we to take this to mean that chapter 20 may be the next vision John receives, however that doesn't necessarily mean that the contents of the vision occur chronology next after the occurrences of chapter 19? Premillennialism (which is my viewpoint) says that the events of chapter 20 do come next after the events of chapter 19.

We have discussed in prior lessons that we have to be cautious not to confuse the **sequence** of John's visions with how the **contents** of John's visions link together. It can be that at times the contents and events predicted do occur in sequence; but at other times they occur in parallel, and at yet other times at least some part of a vision may occur prior to a vision that was given to us earlier. How to tell the difference is challenging and the decision one makes plays a substantial role in how one interprets these End Times events. And yet, it seems to me that there are ways, however imperfect, to help us distinguish one from the other.

For instance, some chapters (like chapter 12) have the ability to stand alone as they give us information whereby sequence doesn't really matter. Whether those events come before or after another vision of John's doesn't materially alter its meaning or interpretation. Chapter 11 is similar; what difference does it make in interpreting Revelation as to when John measures the Temple? So we get these chunks of information about the nature of things that will happen, but where exactly they sequentially fit in the chain of events isn't all that critical for us to know.

However in other cases the sequence of events is critical and it does matter. One of my underlying principles about studying God's Word is that we are to take it literally and in the sequence we find it unless there is a compelling reason to see it otherwise. For instance: when Christ is spoken of as the Lamb, we are to take that symbolically. At no time does Yeshua transform into a sheep, walking on 4 legs with white wool growing from His skin. Or earlier in Revelation, when the Believing congregations of Asia are called lamp stands (menorahs, really), clearly those particular assemblies are not actual metal lamp stands; so we have in these 2 examples of symbolism the object being to compare (or even to apply) the attributes of one thing to another.

At other times the reasonable certainty of chronological sequence is obvious. For instance: the final words of chapter 12 are: "Then the dragon stood on the seashore". And the first words of chapter 13 are: "And I saw a beast come up out of the sea". So we have obvious sequence. In chapter 18 we have a long narrative that includes the wailing and mourning of various groups of people whose livelihoods depended on the world economic system overseen by the suddenly destroyed Babylon, and next in chapter 19 is a series of jubilant praises from the residents of Heaven for God having overseen the destruction of Babylon. Obviously the events of chapter 19 follow the events of chapter 18.

So here is the logic I have employed in an attempt to ascertain the proper sequence of events: since clearly chapter 19 logically follows chapter 18, and because chapter 19 includes the event when Christ returned and destroyed the rebellious armies at the Battle of Armageddon (instigated by Satan), then it logically follows that once that is done God would directly deal with Satan just as we see occurring in chapter 20. After all: if as some commentators claim and some denominational doctrines decree that God had already subdued Satan (as we read

about to begin chapter 20) sometime earlier (that is, Satan is bound before the events of chapter 19 and maybe even before the events of chapter 18), if Satan had been bound and unable to lead or to deceive the nations there likely would not have been a Battle of Armageddon. So simply from an issue of common literary structure, if not common sense, chapters 18, 19, and 20 are events that MUST happen in the sequence that is given to us or they make little sense. As for how much time might have passed in between this series of momentous events? That's impossible to determine because nothing definitive is given. However the sense and tone of it is that these things happen in fairly rapid fashion.

With that understanding let's go back to verse 1. After Christ has defeated the nations at Armageddon, and after the Beast and the False Prophet are thrown into the Lake of Fire, we find an angel coming down from Heaven to subdue Satan and lock him up in the Abyss. Notice this: while the terms "The Beast" and "The False Prophet" are symbolic, they are symbolic of two real human people who will be alive during the last days and will do these predicted things. The Beast is figurative of the Anti-Christ, the leader of the world government, who will be a real, living, breathing human being. And the False Prophet is figurative of the leader of the religious institution sanctioned by the Beast, who will also be a real, living, breathing human being. But when we read of the Devil and the chains that hold him prisoner in the Abyss, these are symbolic not of real, living, breathing people but rather since the Devil is a spiritual and not a physical being, then the chains are figurative of some type of supernatural binding that the Lord has placed upon him. It is this constant mixing of the literal, symbolic, physical and spiritual that makes Revelation the challenge that it is to interpret.

As for the Lake of Fire: it too is symbolic on the one hand, and yet it seems to be an actual spiritual place on the other hand. I don't want to get too "out there", but one way to think about the reality of the Lake of Fire is in the same way we think of Heaven. We can all agree that Heaven is certainly "real"; but is it also an actual "place"? I say that it is an actual place; but it is a place unlike anything we know or can imagine because it exists in another dimension somewhere outside the 4 dimensions that we human beings live in. Heaven resides in a dimension that we have no means to access or enter until our spiritual souls are released from these corrupted physical bodies and then we're able to escape the bounds of these 4 dimensions. Thus there is no reason that the Lake of Fire cannot be real and an actual place; however it exists in another dimension outside of the 4 that we live in, just as does Heaven.

In fact (and now I suppose I am really going to get "out there") way back in our study of Genesis I spent some time explaining how perhaps the chief governing dynamic of the entire physical Universe of God's creation is that it is a universe of opposites. If we have an up, we necessarily have a down. If we have a positive we necessarily have a negative. If we have life, we have death. If we have good, we have evil. If we have light, we have darkness (and on and on). Therefore, since the disembodied souls of the righteous dead are given a place to go (Heaven), then the disembodied souls of the evil dead necessarily also have a place to go (Hell: the Lake of Fire). And by the way: this is not how it will always be as we'll find later in the Book of Revelation (but I don't want to talk about it right now and ruin the ending for you).

We have encountered this angel with the key to the Abyss earlier in Revelation. In chapter 9 we read:

**CJB Revelation 9:1 - 2** ***<sup>1</sup>The fifth angel sounded his shofar; and I saw a star that had fallen out of heaven onto the earth, and he was given the key to the shaft leading down to the Abyss.***

***<sup>2</sup> He opened the shaft of the Abyss, and there went up smoke from the shaft like the smoke of a huge furnace; the sun was darkened, and the sky too, by the smoke from the shaft.***

As we discussed back in chapter 9, the term "star" is often used in the Bible as a metaphor for an angel. But here in chapter 20 we see the actual term "angel" being used to identify the keeper of the key to the Abyss.

It is important to notice how in chapter 9 God sent an angel with the key to the Abyss to open it up and release the demons that were locked up in it in order for them to torment earth people. Now in chapter 20, Satan (and likely his demon minions) are sent to the Abyss. Satan is said to be bound in chains and locked up there for 1000 years. The opening to the Abyss (which is spoken of in chapter 9 as the shaft leading down to the Abyss) is sealed up and it seems that Satan can never again be a bother. In fact we're told that since he is locked away he can't deceive the nations of the earth any longer to oppose God. But then at the end of verse 3 we get this short, startling sentence: "After that, he has to be set free for a little while." What?!! Why?!! We'll get to that in due time.

Although it is not my goal to turn any of you into theologians, it is important to know how much of Christianity thinks about the message of Revelation chapter 20. So I do need to mention that those denominations who adhere to what is called the Amillennial doctrine of the End Times say two important things about Revelation 20. 1) that there is no actual 1000 year era; it is strictly symbolic of the entire indefinite period of time of the so-called Church Age. And 2) the event we read of about Satan being bound up in chains and placed in the Abyss takes place not in the End Times but rather it happened long ago, at the cross. Therefore, ever since the crucifixion of Christ the Devil has been bound up and sent to the Abyss where he can cause no harm to, or in any way influence, Christians or the Church, and he also cannot deceive peoples and nations. I'm not going to spend much time to dispute all this except to say that one has to allegorize and spiritualize the Bible (heavily) to arrive at such a conclusion and one has to see at least some of John's "End Times" visions as not being about the End Times at all but rather as a statement of past history even for him in his day. This is the view of the Catholic Church, many (if not most) of the mainline and mostly liberal Protestant Churches, and of most of the Eastern Orthodox church branches.

Of those 2 main claims in Amillennialist doctrine, the issue of the 1000 years as not being an actual, literal number of years is difficult for me to accept as legitimate. Here in Revelation chapter 20 we see that in verses 2 -7 the term "1000 years" is used 6 times. It speaks of periods of time that the Devil will be subdued, how long Believers will rule with Yeshua, how long after the first resurrection before the rest of the dead will be resurrected, and how long before Satan will be set free from the Abyss in order to foment a rebellion among the nations. To interpret this 1000 years as an indeterminate amount of time or even as a symbolic amount of time is most difficult for me since it is repeated again and again and it is tied to specific



events. The Amillennial position therefore makes the use of the number 1000 utterly meaningless; and one has to ask why such a specific number would be used multiple times in a 5 verse cluster if it was to have no discernable meaning, passing along no useful information to John's readers. Using the principle of taking the Holy Scriptures literally unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise then we must take the 1000 years to mean a literal 1000 years..... 10 centuries..... of measurable time as we currently understand it.

The second of those two main claims of Amillennialism is even more difficult than the first for me to consider as legitimate. There is no Scripture that can be taken **in context** to back up such a claim that the Devil was bound when Christ was crucified. Or that the Devil is currently restricted from harming Believers, or from corrupting Believing Congregations, or from deceiving peoples and nations into doing his evil bidding. Frankly, all one has to do is read history books or even to live for a few years in modern times to know this contradicts the reality of everything we see going on around us. If we've been living in the era of a restrained and uninvolved Satan for 2000 years, why is the state of the world so increasingly dark and wicked, and why is human behavior no better during this time than what it was in the previous 2000 years? Why is God going to judge Satan, putting all the world's evil and filthiness on his shoulders, and in the End Times destroy him, if he has had nothing to do with world events or human decisions since the day Christ died? Under such a scenario the ongoing spirit of Babylon the Great that has corrupted mankind and led billions into misery and eternal death, and the scores of oppressions and attempted genocides of God's people, would then relieve Satan of any responsibility and make him as but an innocent bystander. And yet, this is the logical conclusion to where the doctrine of Amillennialism leads. Thus excellent Bible commentators even including the illustrious G.K. Beale who adhere to this rather puzzling manmade doctrine attempt to somewhat rearrange Scripture in order to make this improbable scenario seem realistic and possible. The problem is that this doctrine defies the Scriptures as written; and it denies the state of things in this world since time immemorial that are, and have been, self-evident. But it is also a prime example of taking the Word of God and through liberal application of allegory and spiritualization make it to say anything one wants it to say.

Verse 4 begins a short section that upon careful reading is, I'm afraid, full of difficult ambiguities. Let's try to sort it out. John says he sees thrones and those who are seated on them, and that those seated have been given the authority to judge. So who are these seated on the thrones? Who or what, exactly, are they to judge? Next John says he saw those who had been beheaded (executed) for testifying about Yeshua and for proclaiming the Word of God. And then John says he also saw those who had not worshipped the Beast or its image and had not received the mark of the Beast. And to conclude this long verse 4 we're told that "they" came to life and reigned with Messiah for 1000 years. Who is "they"? So this verse creates as many legitimate questions as it answers.

In trying to frame the essence of the ambiguity, I think we can say that essentially John either identifies 3 separate groups of people (those seated on the thrones, those who had been beheaded for their faith, and those who did NOT worship the Beast or its image and had not taken on the Beast's mark of 666); or he identified 1 all-inclusive group of people (those seated on the thrones) that consists of all deceased Believers among which were those that were executed for their faith, and those that refused the mark of the Beast (and whatever sufferings

came with that decision), and those that would not worship the Beast's image (and whatever oppression came with that refusal). What makes this verse so difficult is the repeated use of the Greek word **kai** that is almost always rendered as "and" in our Bibles. But in addition to the common word "and", **kai** can mean "also" or it can mean "indeed" or it can mean "even" or it can mean "but". Thus in one case **kai** can be used to modify the phrase that came before it, or it can be used to modify the phrase that comes after it, or it be used to separate one phrase from another, or it can be used to combine two or more phrases. Very challenging.

I've read several scholars' articles and commentaries on this matter and I can't say whether they might be right or wrong. However I'm going to offer you a little different solution that I think ought to be considered. I see verse 4 as speaking of two groups of Believers: 1) those who are seated on thrones, and 2) all these other Believers who died for any number of reasons... martyrdom, old age, accident, illness... it doesn't matter. But this second group is NOT seated on the thrones. So if that's the case then who are those representing the first group; the group of Believers seated on the thrones and given the authority to judge? Here's the irony of my solution: I'm essentially going to use the same verse that others have used to claim that those seated on the thrones represent **all** Believers including those who were beheaded, those who didn't worship the Beast's image, and those who didn't take on the mark. That verse is:

**CJB Matthew 19:28 *Yeshua said to them, "Yes. I tell you that in the regenerated world, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Isra'el.***

Now on the surface this verse can sound like Messiah is speaking about all Believers ("you who have followed me") that will in the next world sit on thrones. However there's a couple of problems with that viewpoint. The thrones are said to be 12 in number (there HAS to be more than 12 Believers at the end of time), and the judging is not said to be over the whole world but specifically over the 12 tribes of Israel. While this sends up a red flag to me, it usually causes Christian commentators no heartburn because by applying allegory and spiritualizing the words they say that the Church (all Believers) has replaced, or is symbolized by, the 12 tribes of Israel and therefore the 12 thrones are merely figurative of a limitless number of thrones for all members of the Church to sit upon. But the bigger problem with this approach is the verses before the one I just read to you.

**CJB Matthew 19:25-28 <sup>25</sup> *When the talmidim heard this they were utterly amazed. "Then who," they asked, "can be saved?"* <sup>26</sup> *Yeshua looked at them and said, "Humanly, this is impossible; but with God everything is possible."* <sup>27</sup> *Kefa replied, "Look, we have left everything and followed you. So what will we have?"***

**<sup>28</sup> *Yeshua said to them, "Yes. I tell you that in the regenerated world, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Isra'el.***

So in the context of His statement, who is Yeshua talking to? His 12 Disciples! 12 Jewish men (12 Israelites) to whom He says that they will sit on 12 thrones and judge the 12 tribes of Israel. He makes this promise directly to them and to no one else. I cannot find a Scripture, in context,

that says all Believers in general are going to be given their own thrones to be seated upon. Therefore if we let Scripture interpret Scripture, Revelation 20:4 seems to be speaking about those 12 Disciples finally getting the reward that Jesus Himself promised to them and is recorded in Matthew 19.

As for the other Believers in verse 4; they are the souls of those who testified for Christ (Believers in general), and those who were beheaded for their faith (martyred Believers), and those who had not worshipped the Beast or his image or taken on the 666 (Believers who lived during the time of the Anti-Christ and no doubt suffered grievously). What is going to happen to all these Believers (apart from the 12 Disciples) who lived and died in such varying circumstances and at varying times over history? Verse 5 says that they will come to life (will be resurrected) and rule with Messiah for 1000 years. Is ruling with Messiah the same as sitting on thrones? I don't think so. Sitting on ones own throne is a very special privilege even above the privilege of all Believers being able to judge the universe (in some general way).

***CJB 1 Corinthians 6:1 - 4 <sup>1</sup> How dare one of you with a complaint against another go to court before pagan judges and not before God's people? <sup>2</sup> Don't you know that God's people are going to judge the universe? If you are going to judge the universe, are you incompetent to judge these minor matters? <sup>3</sup> Don't you know that we will judge angels, not to mention affairs of everyday life?***

***<sup>4</sup> So if you require judgments about matters of everyday life, why do you put them in front of men who have no standing in the Messianic Community?***

So: I'm suggesting that one solution for the dilemma of verse 4 is that the Believers seated on thrones are the 12 Disciples and they will judge the literal 12 tribes of Israel just as Christ said they would. And those who came to life and ruled with Messiah for 1000 years are essentially all other Believers. While I can't be 100% certain of this solution, at least it seems to align with Scripture without having to take verses out of context to make it work.

We'll continue with Revelation 20 next week.