

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 45 - Chapter 20 Continued

The 20th chapter of the Book of Revelation begins like this:

^{CJB} Revelation 20:1 - 3 ¹ Next I saw an angel coming down from heaven, who had the key to the Abyss and a great chain in his hand. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan [the Adversary], and chained him up for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, locked it and sealed it over him; so that he could not deceive the nations any more until the thousand years were over. After that, he has to be set free for a little while.

I'll spend a few minutes to review last week's lesson because there's some foundational guideposts that need to be established in order to better help us understand the End Times in the way God intended for us to understand it. The goal is to help us live our lives in anticipation of not only the coming turbulence as the end gets nearer, but also what we face today within and without the Church that often opposes God's purpose for us.

Over the centuries Christianity has fractured into many denominations and those denominations have established many doctrines about the End Times that are not uniform. However they do tend to operate within 3 or 4 overriding categories of belief of which scholars have identified and given names. The category I operate from is called Premillennialism. And while there are a number of variants within that view (such as Dispensationalism), which allow denominations to separate themselves just a bit from other similar ones, the primary feature of Premillennialism that is most important is the insistence that there will be a physical, tangible Kingdom of God on earth, ruled and reigned by Yeshua, in person, and it will exist for a literal 1000 years. Another important feature of Premillennialism concerns WHEN this 1000 year Kingdom begins and ends. The starting point is marked by when Messiah returns to lead the fight at the Battle of Armageddon. Upon His victory of this short and decisive war the Lord's Millennial Kingdom is inaugurated. The ending point we'll discuss later.

Another key milestone to mark the inauguration of the 1000 year reign of Christ is that Satan is bound in supernatural chains and put into captivity in the Abyss so that he can no longer be the cause of evil inclinations in humanity to choose disobedience and sin, nor can he deceive peoples and nations into believing and behaving wrongly and thus doing his will instead of God's. Satan's direct influence is ended..... for a time.

The chief doctrinal antagonist to Premillennialism is the doctrine of Amillennialism, which we discussed in our previous lesson. Amillennialism encompasses the largest part of the Church, although it didn't always. The earliest Church Fathers believed in a literal 1000 year Kingdom as the correct End Times doctrine. The basis for Amillennial thought and theology seems to have begun with the Church Father Augustine right around 400 A.D. At first it was roundly

denounced. However over time as the Church advanced further away from its Hebrew heritage and more towards a Greek style of thinking and philosophy, Amillennialism become the predominant End Times belief system. Not surprisingly, then, it is the End Times doctrine of Roman Catholicism, most of the mainline Protestant churches (that we could probably label as theologically liberal), as well as most of the several Eastern Orthodox branches in Asia.

Before I briefly restate the chief features of Amillennialism I want to explain why it is so important for us to understand what it is and what it means for those who adhere to it. Let me begin by stating that generally speaking this doctrine does not involve a salvation issue. That is, Amillennialists are no more nor less inclined to want to be saved than Premillennialists. The Amillennial doctrine does not diminish nor dismiss Jesus Christ as being Savior and Lord. However, there are important features of the Amillennial doctrine that affects far more than merely what will happen in the End Times. I want you to know about this because I guarantee that for everyone listening or watching this lesson, you have friends or family whose church is Amillennialist even if they may not be aware of it. In fact, I have been informed from colleagues and acquaintances who attend church denominations whose basic doctrines include those of Amillennialism that the congregation members rarely have any idea of it because it is not spoken about from the pulpit.

First and foremost, Amillennialism does not believe in the literalness of the Bible. That, right there, is a huge red flag and troublesome reality that ultimately will affect all that they teach and believe. Amillennialism teaches that much of the Bible needs to, and ought to, be taught allegorically. It is always important to define terms; so here is what the Webster dictionary says it means to view something or teach it allegorically. ***The expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence.*** The key words are symbolic, fictional, and generalizations. As a result of allegorical interpretation, Amillennialists also do not believe in a literal Millennial Kingdom on earth ruled by Christ. But this doctrine also has at its root the belief that what we read in Revelation 20 about the Devil being chained up and thrown into captivity has already happened a long time ago when Christ was crucified. Therefore, they say that for the past 2000 years Satan has had nothing to do with human events, and has had no influence over the behavior of mankind. Further, the Church and therefore Christians have been protected from Satan, have no need to fear him, and peoples and nations have not been deceived and led astray by him. In other words, Satan has played no role in human history whatsoever since the day Yeshua was crucified.

Not only does this seem impossible merely by observation as we see the world around us deteriorate morally and grow darker and more wicked with each passing year, but this doctrine also essentially nullifies some of the more important New Testament instructions that we receive from the likes of Peter and James regarding how we are to fight evil and avoid temptation.

CJB 1 Peter 5:8 ⁸ Stay sober, stay alert! Your enemy, the Adversary, stalks about like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

CJB James 4:7 Therefore, submit to God. Moreover, take a stand against the Adversary,

and he will flee from you.

CJB Revelation 2:10 ¹⁰ *Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the Adversary is going to have some of you thrown in prison, in order to put you to the test; and you will face an ordeal for ten days. Remain faithful, even to the point of death; and I will give you life as your crown.*

There are several other Bible passages I could quote for you, but this is sufficient. Every one of these statements about the imminent danger of the person of Satan to Believers is made years, even decades, after Christ was crucified. So the Apostles certainly don't think the Adversary was bound up and made harmless at their Master's death. Therefore it is with full confidence that I say to you that Amillennialism is a poorly constructed and wrong minded manmade doctrine that is more than in error; it can make Believers complacent about the dangers Satan and his demons present to us. It also sends us down impossible rabbit trails when trying to discern the Book of Revelation.

So; we shall move forward understanding that the first 3 verses of Revelation 20 tell us of the binding and removal of Satan from world affairs at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom. And that we can know confidently that there is a literal 1000 year Kingdom in our future, and it will be ruled (in person) by Yeshua. And yet, to mark the end of that 1000 year period of time God will loose Satan upon the world for a short time. In fact, in a few verses that event is covered in more detail.

Because we've read through chapter 20 a couple of times, we'll repeat the verses but in bite-sized chunks. So look with me to verses 4 - 6.

CJB Revelation 20:4-6 ⁴ *Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them received authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for testifying about Yeshua and proclaiming the Word of God, also those who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received the mark on their foreheads and on their hands. They came to life and ruled with the Messiah for a thousand years.* ⁵ *(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were over.) This is the first resurrection.*

⁶ *Blessed and holy is anyone who has a part in the first resurrection; over him the second death has no power. On the contrary, they will be cohanim of God and of the Messiah, and they will rule with him for the thousand years.*

You can look at last week's lesson online to get a fuller explanation, but my opinion is that those thrones and the people sitting on them, are 12 in number. They are the 12 Disciples of Christ and they are the only ones to receive their own personal thrones. They will be ruling over the House of Israel.... all 12 Tribes. To be clear, it will be the members of those 12 Israelite tribes who have trusted in Yeshua as Messiah. Therefore it does NOT include Believers in general, nor any of the others listed in the remainder of verse 4. Rather, those who are the righteous dead, killed or dying for any reason, will come to life and rule with Messiah during that 1000 year reign. But then we get some words that on the surface are ambiguous.

They say "this is the first resurrection". So since this statement comes after saying that the rest of the dead did not come to life until the 1000 years were over, does that mean the first resurrection includes every soul mentioned so far? Or does it pertain only to every soul listed, but does not include those called "the rest of the dead"? I think this can be straightened out by looking to 1 Corinthians.

CJB 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 ²² *For just as in connection with Adam all die, so in connection with the Messiah all will be made alive.* ²³ *But each in his own order: the Messiah is the firstfruits; then those who belong to the Messiah, at the time of his coming;* ²⁴ *then the culmination, when he hands over the Kingdom to God the Father, after having put an end to every rulership, yes, to every authority and power.* ²⁵ *For he has to rule until he puts all his enemies under his feet.* ²⁶ *The last enemy to be done away with will be death.....*

So according to Paul all who are connected to Messiah will be resurrected from the dead. However, there will be a certain order in which resurrection will occur. The first to rise (after Messiah as the firstfruits) will be those who are Believers up to the moment of His 2nd coming. Then at the end (the CJB says "the culmination", which is another way of saying "the end"), at the time Christ hands over the Kingdom to God the Father, there will be another resurrection of Believers. So to be clear; the first resurrection is of those souls of Believers who trusted Christ probably up to the moment He comes leading a Heavenly army (if we determine that is the moment the Bible marks as His 2nd coming). Then from that moment until.....when?..... all others will be resurrected. The "when" of the next resurrection is important. It will be at the end of the 1000 year reign. This is the case because during the 1000 year reign the Kingdom belongs to Christ. After the 1000 year reign, Christ returns it to the Father. And during this 1000 year reign Christ will bring to the end every authority and power, because (we're told) ALL His enemies have to be destroyed. Until the end of the 1000 years, Satan is alive but subdued. So this has to be referring most importantly to a permanent end of Satan and those who follow him.

Now let's back up a bit to verse 3. The last words of that verse are: "After that, he (Satan) has to be set free for a little while". So Satan is going to be intentionally set free at the end of the 1000 years for the purpose of exposing those who have secretly been harboring evil plans against Yeshua and God's Kingdom. During the Millennium evil will have not been eradicated as it still resides in the nature even of Believers. We'd like to think, and it's been taught by some Christian leaders, that once we receive the new nature from the Holy Spirit as Believers, the old one is dead and gone. But scripturally that's not the case. We're in the very difficult position that both natures..... that of our new self, and that of our old self..... exist within us and they will war against one another to see which can control us. I'm going to read to you an extended dissertation and admission by the Apostle Paul about this very issue. Why? Because this not only explains our current frustrating condition as followers of Messiah, but it also explains why at the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ some large number of individuals will rebel against Him and ultimately be destroyed as a result.

CJB Romans 7:12-25 ¹² *So the Torah is holy; that is, the commandment is holy, just and good.*

¹³ Then did something good become for me the source of death? Heaven forbid! Rather, it was sin working death in me through something good, so that sin might be clearly exposed as sin, so that sin through the commandment might come to be experienced as sinful beyond measure. ¹⁴ For we know that the Torah is of the Spirit; but as for me, I am bound to the old nature, sold to sin as a slave. ¹⁵ I don't understand my own behavior- I don't do what I want to do; instead, I do the very thing I hate!

¹⁶ Now if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am agreeing that the Torah is good. ¹⁷ But now it is no longer "the real me" doing it, but the sin housed inside me. ¹⁸ For I know that there is nothing good housed inside me- that is, inside my old nature. I can want what is good, but I can't do it! ¹⁹ For I don't do the good I want; instead, the evil that I don't want is what I do! ²⁰ But if I am doing what "the real me" doesn't want, it is no longer "the real me" doing it but the sin housed inside me.

²¹ So I find it to be the rule, a kind of perverse "torah," that although I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me! ²² For in my inner self I completely agree with God's Torah; ²³ but in my various parts, I see a different "torah," one that battles with the Torah in my mind and makes me a prisoner of sin's "torah," which is operating in my various parts.

²⁴ What a miserable creature I am! Who will rescue me from this body bound for death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God [, he will]!- through Yeshua the Messiah, our Lord!

Have you ever stumbled (perhaps badly!) in your walk with God and had these same thoughts afterward? Why, oh why, would I do such a thing when I know better !? When I have the Holy Spirit living within me? I have. And Paul did. So we're in pretty good company. Basically Paul says that while we have a new nature in our souls, our minds are still slaves to our old natures. So it is battle of old mind versus regenerated soul. And this battle will exist throughout the Millennium such that at the end, some significant number of people will lose this battle to their evil inclinations. In the Millennial Kingdom Messiah will not be ruling over a perfect planet or over a population of perfect people. This is why He is going to rule with an iron rod..... a no tolerance policy for sin. Because if sin in humans ended as Christ came into power, there would be no need for the Torah to set down the law, and no need to rule with unyielding authority.

Now comes another difficult question; and what I'm about to say is my opinion based on contextually relevant Scriptural evidence. Are those who were Believers at Christ's 2nd coming getting a somewhat different treatment than those who become Believers afterward? Yes, it certainly seems so. Not only are those who had a saving faith by the time of His return going to be the first to rise, they are going to rule and reign with Christ during that 1000 year period (as a reward for their faithfulness). This is why the first words of verse 6 call this group blessed and holy. Blessed tells of their condition; holy speaks of their absolute purity. None of these who died prior to this time will ever be involved in the rebellion led by Satan at the end of the 1000 years and none of these will die during the Millennium because they've already died once. So they will be present and alive in the Kingdom, on earth, ruling with Messiah for the entire 1000 year period. Those who died after Yeshua's 2nd coming, and those who live and die during the

1000 year reign, will be resurrected at the end of that 1000 year period.

Consider this: during the Millennial Kingdom, at first it will be populated by a minority of Believers who survived the End Times calamities plus a majority of re-embodied souls of Believers who died prior to the 2nd coming. Thus it seems it will be a mixed population. Those who return to earth from Heaven in what I can only call "glorified bodies" (of which I can say no more because I know no more), will live throughout the 1000 years. Those who survived the End Times and enter the Millennial Kingdom as Believers will age and die; as will their offspring. And keep this in mind: since the children of those Believers will be just as much regular human beings as you and I, it means that they will in no way be born redeemed. They will have to make the same conscious choice to love and trust Messiah as we had to. And, clearly, some will not accept Him and most of those who don't will have to pretend as though they did so as not to be discovered and dealt with. So there will be births and deaths of human beings all during the Millennial Kingdom, and as Ezekiel 40 - 48 demonstrates, animals will also lose their lives on the Temple altar. This is why we read in 1Corinthians 15:26 that the last thing to be conquered at the end of the Millennial period will be death itself. The human population will increase but the re-embodied population will remain static the entire 1000 years. So by the end of 1000 years, I imagine the regular human population will be larger than those who now wear glorified bodies, because while those with glorified bodies will not age and die, they also will not be procreating.

Let's read verses 7 - 10.

CJB Revelation 20:7-10 ⁷ When the thousand years are over, the Adversary will be set free from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for the battle. Their number is countless as the sand on the seashore; ⁹ and they came up over the breadth of the Land and surrounded the camp of God's people and the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and consumed them. 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.

As verse 3 stated, Satan will be freed at the end of the 1000 years and he will lead the nations in rebellion. This tells us something important about the Millennial Kingdom: there will continue to be nations. In order for a nation to be a nation it must have borders and a government. We're also told that the rebellion will come from Satan deceiving the nations and the nations will come from the 4 quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, and gather for battle. Who are they going to battle? Unbelievably, since Christ is ruling in person, either Satan has deceived some among the nations into thinking that He really isn't God, or that even if He is God He can still be defeated. On the other hand, we need to remember that 1000 years will have passed since the Battle of Armageddon and Christ returning in such a spectacular fashion that it left no doubt among mankind of who He is and the truth of God's Word. As humans we can lose our memory of history in less than a generation; so with 10 centuries having transpired, Christ ruling the world will have become rather old hat.

Since we read of Gog and Magog as front and center in the battle of Armageddon, is this the

same Gog and Magog rebelling once again? Perhaps; but I think not. I think that this time God and Magog are but representative of those among all the earth's nations who are going to rebel against Christ. This is the case because the wording is: "⁷ **When the thousand years are over, the Adversary will be set free from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for the battle.** So it is not that Gog and Magog are necessarily the proper names of rebellious nations or the names of rebellious leaders of nations, but rather they represent all the rebellious nations of the planet. And since Gog and Magog were the primary forces at the Battle of Armageddon, we see a similar pattern arise at the end of the Millennium regarding who participated and the final result.

As verse 8 states, the number of rebels will be enormous. This means that, just as with the Battle of Armageddon a thousand years earlier, their sheer numbers are the source of their self-destructive arrogance, and deceives them into thinking that they cannot lose. Satan, whose primary characteristics are liar and deceiver, convinces the nations that they can win and establish their own government. These nations who have banded together will march towards "the Land", meaning Israel, with intent to attack "the city He loves". "The city He loves" is Jerusalem; but it is a new title for the city. Never before in the Bible has a similar description been used for Jerusalem. However this is the Millennial Jerusalem; a redeemed Jerusalem that is the place where Yeshua resides, and it is the capital city of the worldwide Kingdom of God. This Jerusalem is as pure as the older Jerusalem was corrupt. So there can be no doubt who and what the target of Gog and Magog is; it is the very heart of God's Kingdom on earth. And who else would lead a battle to wrest control of this government away from God's Son but Satan, God's Adversary, who wants to govern the earth as a god? So Israel is front and center not only in the End Times but even into the age of the Millennial Kingdom.

Here is a principle that every reader and interpreter of the Bible needs to hold very closely: biblically speaking, from a physical, material, and temporal perspective, everything that happens on earth and everything that is predicted for the future of the earth and humanity, is Israel-centric. From a spiritual perspective, everything that happens in the invisible spiritual sphere and that is predicted for the future, takes place in the biblically described Heaven. This reality riles some Christian denominations and Bible commentators to the point that they will employ extravagant means to find a way to change the physical, material and temporal perspective of the Bible away from Israel and toward the gentile world. In this attempt meaning gets lost and the special set-apart nature of Israel and her people is set on the shelf. When that happens, truth takes a backseat to human traditions and doctrines. And especially when trying to decipher the already difficult Book of Revelation, forgetting this basic principle makes understanding the End Times impossible.

Further; since God is a God of patterns, then of course His pattern of luring the rebellious nations toward Israel and Jerusalem whereby they are supernaturally destroyed is repeated. As it was at Armageddon, so it will be at this battle at the end of the Millennium. So we hear that as the nations' armies readied to attack: "But fire came down from Heaven and consumed them". I'll remind you that there is not one word in chapter 19 about a Believer's army, or an Israeli army, joining the Battle of Armageddon to try and stave off the armies of the nations. We only read that Yeshua came with an army from Heaven and every soldier of the rebellious

armies of the Anti-Christ were destroyed. No protracted war; no war dead on the side of righteousness. And we read here in chapter 20 that the battle at the end of the Millennium was decided similarly. The nations gathered with their weapons and myriads of soldiers, they surrounded Jerusalem, and immediately fire came down from Heaven and killed them all. Not a word about human soldiers from Jerusalem in the battle; not even Heavenly angels.

So now that the wicked have once again been purged from the earth, Satan is dealt with in a permanent fashion. He is thrown into the Lake of Fire to join the Beast and the False Prophet. They will be in torment day and night forever we are told. Here is where we find the closest thing to a fairly definitive statement of the nature of Hell and what happens to those placed there. There can be no doubt (due to the clear and plain sense of the words) that Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet were not destroyed nor their essence forever erased. Rather, their destiny is to be locked away and suffer torment forever.

Fire is always one of two things in the Bible: it is to purify the righteous or to destroy the wicked. But here the fire is used to torment the wicked. There is no escape from it. It is said by some Believers and commentators that being sent to Hell means a permanent separation from God, and that is the torment. I don't think so. The wicked never wanted a relationship with God in the first place. Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet were anything but atheists, so it's not that they didn't believe in God or the supernatural. For them, separation from God was what they sought; closeness to Him was never their desire.

People of all ages understand that being burnt by fire is one of the most painful things a person can endure. So while no doubt a "Lake of Fire" is not the literal, physical place where these evil beings were placed, whatever and where ever it is in the Spiritual realm brings the evil captives at least as much pain and anguish as if a human being were placed, alive, into a pit and set on fire. Only the captive never goes unconscious or dies, and the fire never stops burning.

Let us also remember that since this event is taking place in the spiritual sphere, the dimension of time is missing. Therefore the mention of "forever" is the same as saying "eternally"; and eternity represents NOT a really, really long time but rather the absence of time entirely. The promise of God to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 has finally come about.

CJB Genesis 3:15 ¹⁵ I will put animosity between you and the woman, and between your descendant and her descendant; he will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."

We'll continue in Revelation 20 next week.