

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 46 - Chapters 20 and 21

As we continue Revelation chapter 20, here is where we stand. Time still exists; we have not yet entered eternity. The Battle of Armageddon is over. Messiah Yeshua has returned, victorious, and His 1000 year reign has begun. The only living people on earth are, at this moment, Believers. The people who are populating the earth all throughout the Millennium consist of re-embodied souls of the righteous dead who now inhabit glorified bodies that will never die. They are joined by regular humans who live out a normal life span, just as we currently do, and then pass away. The regular humans will have offspring of their own, their offspring will have offspring and so on, and this part of earth's population will proceed and increase just as it happens today, generation after generation, for 10 centuries. This means that all during the Millennium the earth's population will experience an accelerating rise. Satan and all of His henchmen and followers are now captives in the Abyss and this means that mankind has no external evil influence; however the part of the population of regular human beings that live and die will continue on with evil inclinations as part of their nature and this unfortunate reality shows up especially at the end of the 1000 years.

Make no mistake; the first several years of the Millennial Kingdom will be a worldwide environmental clean-up campaign. The earth will be terribly scarred from the earthquakes, wars, God's supernatural judgments on the land, air, and oceans that occurred in the last days, and the corpses of the innumerable dead will be scattered about the planet. Scavenger birds and other carrion eating animals will do their part; but humanity will also have to pitch in to bury the millions and millions of war dead. The earth will still be divided up into nations; but the King of the world, Yeshua, will be ruling over it all from Jerusalem.

Let's re-read the last paragraph of Revelation chapter 20.

RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 20:11 - end

CJB Revelation 20:11-15 ¹¹ Next I saw a great white throne and the One sitting on it. Earth and heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, both great and small, standing in front of the throne. Books were opened; and another book was opened, the Book of Life; and the dead were judged from what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

¹³ The sea gave up the dead in it; and Death and Sh'ol gave up the dead in them; and they were judged, each according to what he had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Sh'ol were hurled into the lake of fire. This is the second death- the lake of fire. ¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the Book of Life was hurled into the lake of fire.

Much has been written about the Great White Throne judgment. What that means, and even when exactly it happens, depends on the End Times doctrines of whatever denomination one

belongs to. Rather than present you with a variety of interpretations I'm only going to give you mine.

The Great White Throne is speaking of God's Heavenly throne. There is much reasonable debate over whether this is referring to the throne of God the Father or that of God the Son. Probably the most popular choice within modern evangelical Christianity is the belief that this is referring to Christ's throne. I believe this is referring to the ultimate throne of God the Father for some reasons that will shortly become apparent.

To begin with the terms "the One" and "the Ancient One" are names used in the Old Testament to refer to the Father. The color white, as we see regularly in the Bible, refers to purity and it means the same thing here when referring to the great throne. Throughout Revelation the One who is seated on the throne is always God the Father. When God the Son is pictured it is always as standing before Him.

^{CJB} Revelation 5:1 - 5 ¹ Next I saw in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals; ² and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"

³ But no one in heaven, on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or look inside it.

⁴ I cried and cried, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look inside it. ⁵ One of the elders said to me, "Don't cry. Look, the Lion of the tribe of Y'hudah, the Root of David, has won the right to open the scroll and its seven seals."

^{CJB} Revelation 19:4-5 ⁴ The twenty-four elders and the four living beings fell down and worshipped God, sitting on the throne, and said, "Amen! Halleluyah!"

⁵ A voice went out from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great!"

And yet, from the Apostle John himself in his Gospel account we read:

^{CJB} John 5:19-29 ¹⁹ Therefore, Yeshua said this to them: "Yes, indeed! I tell you that the Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; whatever the Father does, the Son does too. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does; and he will show him even greater things than these, so that you will be amazed. ²¹ Just as the Father raises the dead and makes them alive, so too the Son makes alive anyone he wants.

²² The Father does not judge anyone but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ so that all may honor the Son as they honor the Father. Whoever fails to honor the Son is not honoring the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Yes, indeed! I tell you that whoever hears what I am saying and trusts the One who sent me has eternal life- that is, he will not come up for judgment but has already crossed over from death to life!

²⁵ Yes, indeed! I tell you that there is coming a time- in fact, it's already here- when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who listen will come to life. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has given the Son life to have in himself. ²⁷ Also he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.

²⁸ Don't be surprised at this; because the time is coming when all who are in the grave will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out- those who have done good to a resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to a resurrection of judgment.

The truth is that in some ways what John has to say here muddies the waters of what he reports in Revelation 20 about the occupier of the white throne. And yet the real issue is not that John is contradicting himself, it is that the relationship between God the Father and God the Son is so unified, so ***echad***, that while they represent different attributes of the same God it in some ways comes close to what we might call a division of labor. That is, the Son cannot decide or do on His own, but only what His Father decides and does. So the Son is more or the less the divine agent that brings about the will of the Father, even in Creation.

^{CJB} John 1:1 - 3 ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ All things came to be through him, and without him nothing made had being.

In my opinion there is no point to debating whether the One sitting on the throne is the Father (as I think it is) or it's the Son, because it can rightly be said that God and Yeshua are undertaking the task of executing judgment together. I deal with this verse by envisioning, as with all of Revelation, the Father as the One who is sitting on the throne but with Yeshua in His presence. And while the Father is seated on the throne, that in no way prohibits the Son from participating in the judging process.... that is the Son doesn't need to sit on a throne in order to judge.

The next sentence is also somewhat vexing because it says that John saw earth and heaven fleeing from God's presence and no place was found for them (the "them" is earth and heaven). In looking around at the opinions of various Bible scholars I don't find an interpretation that varies greatly from this rather popular one. It is that on account of God being so pure, earth and heaven can't be near Him so God orders that they get away from Him. I find this problematic because if this is referring to heaven as the place where God lives, heaven certainly can't be impure. And if it is referring to heaven in the sense of "the heavens", the universe, then where do the earth and the universe flee to in order to stay clear of God?

Rather I see this statement as a preface to what we're going to read beginning in chapter 21: the story of the new earth and new heaven. Further, I see heaven in this context as referring to the Universe and not the place where God resides. We've discussed on numerous occasions the ancient belief in the structure of the earth and cosmos, and that the term heaven was used to describe two different areas. The term heaven, heavens, and mid-heaven are somewhat interchangeable and they refer to where the sun, the moon, and the stars reside..... what we call the Universe. But, the ancients also thought this same region is where the clouds floated

and the birds flew. Only above that was the region of the divine heaven where God lived. So biblically heaven was a rather broad term that described pretty much everything that was above the heads of humans and not directly attached to the earth.

God's goal, since the fall of man, has been to redeem, restore, and perfect His creation that was corrupted with sin. While the earth and the physical universe can be legitimately seen as corrupt, Heaven (of the spiritual sphere) certainly is not corrupt and needs no redeeming or restoration. So John's comment about his vision of earth and heaven fleeing God's presence is a poetic, cultural (and non-scientific) way of describing the physical universe disappearing or returning to its original state of nothingness prior to the Creation. Thus from John's perspective if the earth and the Universe flee from God, all that remains is God.

For those among you with a science interest or science background, think of this in terms of the origin of the Universe; what science sometimes calls the Big Bang. That is, science has observed and calculated that the entire universe originated from one tiny identifiable point. All the elements that are used to create every material thing that exists developed over time but originated from this one single point. How this tiny point came into existence they cannot answer (because science has no means or method to answer those sorts of questions), and what came before it they cannot answer for the same reason. And just as mysteriously, why this tiny point suddenly expanded and exploded also cannot be answered. Yet science nearly universally claims that all matter and energy that exists yesterday and today and will exist in our future originally came from this tiny point. Frankly there is little reason to dispute this theory and every reason to accept it if for no other reason than because it is anything but the conclusion that scientists wanted to reach. After all, if all matter and energy can be traced to a miniscule single point from long ago, then it leads to one overriding conundrum: having to explain who or what put it there. As God worshippers and Bible believers, we know that before anything else existed God was; and it was He who created this tiny point and it was He who brought the Universe into existence from this tiny point in whatever way He did it.

Where I'm heading is that perhaps what is happening in verse 11 is the reversal of that original Creation process in order for there to be a new Creation to restore or replace the former one. Whereas up to now the Universe is continuing to expand at what seems to be an increasing rate, what we are reading about may well be the collapsing of the Universe back into that single point so that it can be reformed and remade. It's only that John frames it by saying that the earth and the heavens (the cosmos) are fleeing from God. Everything is suddenly being reduced from the vast universe as we know it today, and compressed back down to the tiniest particles and most dense form of energy as it was in the beginning, and then later at the start of chapter 21 it is put back together very differently from what the Universe was before. Think of it as getting a box of Legos, making something interesting out them, then taking it all completely apart and putting the pieces back into their original box. Later the box is opened and something entirely different gets constructed. And yet, the basic building blocks remain the same.

Next the dead were resurrected. The collapse of the Universe and this resurrection of the dead are occurring at the end of the Millennial Kingdom. Since this is happening after the 1000 year period, it is referring to what was promised back in verse 5. ⁵ ***(The rest of the dead did not***

come to life until the thousand years were over.) (Rev. 20:5 CJB). This is the second resurrection and it consists of two groups of departed souls: 1) Those Believers who were regular humans that lived and then died after a normal life span during the Millennial Kingdom, and 2) all the unrighteous dead who have ever lived at any time in history including during the Millennium. Every one of these are stood in front of God's throne and judgment is pronounced upon them.

CJB Romans 14:10-11 ¹⁰ You then, why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For all of us will stand before God's judgment seat; ¹¹ since it is written in the Tanakh, "As I live, says ADONAI, every knee will bend before me, and every tongue will publicly acknowledge God."

CJB 2 Corinthians 5:10 ¹⁰ for we must all appear before the Messiah's court of judgment, where everyone will receive the good or bad consequences of what he did while he was in the body.

So let me be clear: at the inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom only the righteous Believers in Christ were brought back to life. But now, at the end of the Millennium, all who had not been brought back to life in the first resurrection, the evil and the righteous, are raised and set before God.

Interestingly not one but two different books are being used in this judgment process. The books are figurative of course; these things exist in the spiritual, not the physical, sphere. One of the books was called the Book of Life, where the names of all the people who were predetermined to live with God eternally are recorded. The other book records the deeds of every human who ever lived: righteous or unrighteous. Verse 12 is crystal clear: the raised dead were judged based on what was recorded in these two books. And what they had done when they were alive....their deeds whether evil or good.... play a significant role in their eternal futures.

Before I go any further I want to speak about something that has been so terribly misconstrued, if not downright taught in error, in modern Christianity. Our deeds, our works, DO matter to God. Our deeds and our works therefore have an eternal consequence. It is so very distressing to me that a common refrain among modern Believers is that once they receive Christ, their deeds and works not only don't matter any longer, any attempt at good deeds and works, or any attempt to avoid bad deeds and works, amounts to legalism, and thus is a bad thing. This is decidedly not scriptural. While our good deeds are the not the key to our salvation, they are the expected response to our salvation. No Believer is exempt from this obligation of performing good works before God. One biblical term used to symbolize the expected response to our salvation is "fruit" or "good fruit". Fruit or good fruit, means only one thing: our works and deeds.

CJB Matthew 7:17-20 ¹⁷ Likewise, every healthy tree produces good fruit, but a poor tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, or a poor tree good fruit. ¹⁹ Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire! ²⁰ So you will recognize them by their fruit.

So here in Revelation 20 we find that there is a heavenly book that has recorded every deed (the fruit of our lives) we have ever done both good and bad. Thus Believers will find their names recorded in both books; however non-Believers will only be recorded in one book. Believers will be listed in the Book of Life, but also in the book of deeds. Non-Believers will not be present in the Book of Life and only recorded in the book of deeds. Thus just as Christ said in His Sermon on the Mount, Believers will be divided up into some hierarchy based on our deeds. But what is the standard for what is a "good" deed versus a "bad" deed? Clearly there must be a universal standard that is equally applied to all humans or it wouldn't be just. I wonder what that standard might be?

CJB Matthew 5:17-19 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.

¹⁹ So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

So there will be a societal hierarchy established with the "least" at one end and the "great" at the other. And, as Yeshua says, the Torah.... the Law of Moses.... is the standard.

Verse 12 hints at a couple of fascinating possibilities. It's already established that while Believers are fully forgiven for our sins and our bad deeds, and that we will have a wonderful eternal life with God, there will also be a hierarchy of eternal society based on our behavior and level of obedience to God's standard when we were alive. But what about the non-Believers? Do their deeds matter at all at this point? This verse says that they, too, will be judged according to what they had done. I think we've all known some truly kind, generous, loving people who were agnostic or atheist, or perhaps had some ill-defined belief in the existence of God but never placed their trust in Christ. Since verse 15 says that anyone whose name was not found in the Book of Life will be placed into the Lake of Fire, then no matter how nice and wonderful these non-Believers are or were, Hell is their future. And yet.... the implication here is that their deeds do seem to play some role in their eternity even if it is in Hell. In other words, that loving, kind, generous agnostic neighbor perhaps doesn't get treated quite the same as Adolf Hitler. I don't want to press this too far because this might be reading too much into what is being said; so I'm only offering this as a suggestion. Yet it's hard to see this scriptural statement in another light. This much is certain: no matter how wonderful or horrific the lives and deeds of a non-Believer were, the Lake of Fire will be their final destination. Perhaps it's only that their experiences there will be somewhat different based on their earthly deeds.

Verse 13 explains that the sea gave up its dead, and so did Death and **She'ol**. However since **She'ol** is a Hebrew word, among English Bibles we'll only find that translation in the CJB. In all other English versions we'll find the word Hell or Hades. So a more typical English Bible version says that the sea, death and Hell will give up their dead. Hell is an English word that translates the Greek word **Hades** that we find here. What we need to understand is that in the

Greek language the word used to speak about the underworld of the dead is **Hades**. However the Greek concept of **Hades** as an elaborate underworld of the dead does not exist in Hebrew thought, and it certainly could not have been what the Jew John had in mind. What John meant is best expressed by our CJB when it uses the word **She'ol**.

She'ol simply means the grave. It does not extend to including some kind of mythical underworld (although some amount of ancestor worship was included in Old Testament times). And since standard Hebrew burial practice is to be buried in the earth, then that is integral to the concept of **She'ol**. That is, **She'ol** is a grave dug into the earth's soil and a corpse is placed in it. The Hebrews knew nothing of "burial at sea" (for them it is an oxymoron to speak of being buried in water). Certainly a Jew might drown in the sea and his body was never recovered. But where he rested was not **She'ol** because for it to be **She'ol** the person's final resting place had to be in soil on the earth's surface; a grave, just as we think of it.

Therefore this matter of the sea giving up its dead is not some type of yet another resurrection; it is all part of the second one. It is merely parallel to it, or another aspect of it, and is addressing a situation that many Hebrews would have been concerned about: what happens in the resurrection for those lost at sea?

But, now, what does it mean for Death to give up its dead? That's a rather curious expression. The Greek word used here for Death is **thanatos** and it speaks to the miserable state of the dead as opposed to it being a place of the dead or the dead person. Death was very mysterious to these ancient people, and to the Hebrews as well. So it is that the intent of speaking of Death giving up its dead, in addition to the sea and the grave giving up their dead, is to say that every possible place a dead person might be, and every possible state of death a human body might assume (known and unknown to humanity), is being included. Thus there are no exceptions; no one is overlooked for any reason. If a human being ever lived, as of the Great White Throne judgment they were made alive and standing before God for His verdict about their eternal futures.

Next in verse 14 Death and **She'ol** were tossed into the Lake of Fire. Once again we find the Greek word **thanatos** being translated as Death, and Hades being correctly translated in our CJB as **She'ol**. So the idea is that Death as referring to the miserable state of the dead, as well as the grave (the actual place where the dead are buried), are both done away with and held eternally captive with the Devil and all non-Believers in the Lake of Fire. Quite simply this means that as of the end of the Millennial Kingdom period, death and all that it encompasses no longer exists. Only life.

Those raised from the dead, and judged unworthy of eternal life with God, are condemned to their second death. The first was their physical death, and now they experience their spiritual death. All essence of them will exist only in the Lake of Fire, which seems to be a spiritual place that is sequestered apart from all other existence in any realm or dimension. Their existence, frighteningly, will be one that is fully conscious of their predicament.

Now let's move on the part of the Book of Revelation that I have been longing to get to!

READ REVELATION CHAPTER 21 all

Before we get into studying my favorite part of Revelation we need to address an important matter: what happened to this event spoken of in chapter 20 verse 3 that says that at the end of the 1000 years Satan has to be released for a little while? The reason for his being locked up was so he could not deceive the nations during that 1000 year period. So logically when he is released it will be for the purpose of again deceiving the nations. The question remains: why would God free him and not just immediately throw Satan in the Lake of Fire, getting rid of him once and for all? We are not told. So to gain insight on what God's purpose might be, it is generally best to seek out prior biblical pattern. Therefore I believe the reason God is going to release Satan is to use him to expose the wicked hearts of some sizeable number of people living on earth at the end of the Millennium. As I've stated before: the Millennium is not Paradise.

The earth's population is going to be large at the end of the Millennium, and even with Christ still ruling, ageless and untiring, from his capital in Jerusalem, many people will forget their past. Recall the story of life in Egypt for the Israelites. When they arrived Joseph was in power and so life was good and prosperous for his father Jacob's rapidly expanding family. For at least a century after Joseph's death the Israelites continued to be an accepted if not even a favored people in Egypt. But then we are told that, in time, the people of Egypt forgot about Joseph and how he saved Egypt from famine, and the promises made to the Israelites, and they turned against them, making them slaves. At the end of the Millennium, after 10 centuries of what will be uninterrupted stability, peace, and moral living on this planet the time will come that the regular human people whose numbers are now vast will forget the past, become complacent and restless, and desire to break out from under the "iron rod" rule of Yeshua who reigns perfectly and so tolerates no deviance from the Law of Moses.

The release of Satan from the Abyss will, I speculate, galvanize support for a rebellion among the nations. But it will no doubt follow the pattern of Armageddon and be put down quickly. The rebels will have laid bare their wicked hearts, God will instantly deal with them, and once again the earth is purged of wickedness and all that will remain are righteous Believers. Satan, the father of sin and evil, will be cast into the Lake of Fire forever. This is all in preparation for what comes next: the new earth and new heaven.

And that is what we'll begin to examine next time.