

Revelation 20

The Millennium

Almost 150 years ago the famous French writer Victor Hugo wrote “In the twentieth century war will be dead. The scaffold will be dead. Hatred will be dead. But man will live. He will possess something higher than all these...the whole earth, a great hope, the whole heaven.”

If Monsieur Hugo were alive I am sure that he would weep over his prediction. Here in the twenty-first century war is still very much alive. The scaffold is gone, but only because it has been replaced by lethal injection. And hatred is as strong as ever. Our world is divided, deluded, deceived and devilish. But there is a sure and certain hope for joy and peace and life—glorious life. That hope is secured in God’s gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.

We know from our study of the book of Revelation that the future will include terribly perilous times.¹ But with the physical return of Jesus Christ in power and glory, he will defeat the Antichrist and Satan and he will reclaim the earth and renew it. And he will fulfill the promise of blessing humanity with a righteous kingdom promised to Abraham and also to David many centuries ago. As we read Revelation 20 let’s remember that chronologically it flows immediately after the seven bowl judgments and the battle of Armageddon. Christ has returned as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ²He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

(Revelation 20:1-3)

Two times in these three verses the phrase “a thousand years” occurs. We will read this phrase a total of six times in this chapter. In Latin the phrase comes from two words *mille* and *annum* combined to form the word “millennium” a thousand years. It is this portion of Scripture that teaches that a thousand years

¹ 2 Timothy 3:1-5

of peace, joy and righteousness awaits us in the future after the time of the great tribulation. The millennium of peace will begin with Satan being bound and cast into the bottomless pit of the abyss for a thousand years.

Remember the abyss is a place where certain demon spirits are now imprisoned. When Satan is bound and cast into the abyss he will totally be removed from the earth for one thousand years. Imagine what life will be like on this earth with the Devil bound and the world ruled by Christ. Well we really don't have to imagine, because the Word of God reveals what it will be like.

There will be peace and all wars will stop.² There will be joy.³ There will be justice.⁴ There will be holiness and glory. The earth will be renewed, sickness will be gone and death will exist only as a punishment for extreme sin. Work will be fruitful. There will be economic prosperity. And God will be worshipped with great joy and satisfaction.

The thousand year reign of Jesus Christ will fulfill Old Testament promises of a kingdom to Israel. And it will give humanity one final test when Satan is set free after the thousand years are up. As the dragon, Satan is looking for those he can devour. As the serpent he is ever seeking to deceive. As the Devil he is the great accuser. And called Satan he is the adversary.

And now your brain is probably screaming, "Why? Why is Satan being released?" As I mentioned a moment ago, the millennium will be the final test for humanity. The test is not for God's people. In the next few verses we will see the Old Testament and New Testament believers have been glorified and made immortal and we shall reign with Christ.

But there will be millions of people who will survive the time of God's wrath and they will enter the kingdom too. Every one of them will still need to be saved from their sins by faith in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. And at the end of the millennium Satan will deceive many of these people and stir them up to rebel against Christ. This will show without a doubt that we all need to be saved from sin. It will show that poverty and a lack of education and injustice are not the root causes of evil, sin in the human heart is the root cause. The final test will also show that God has been magnanimously merciful to save us.

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and

² Isaiah 2:4

³ Isaiah 12:36

⁴ Isaiah 9:7

for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵ But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.

This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.
(Revelation 20:4-6)

The fact that there is a first resurrection tells us there will be a second one. And we will read about the second one in a moment. But notice that John did not say he saw the resurrection. The apostle describes believers being given places of authority. It is clear that the resurrection occurred earlier.

Every believer from the beginning of time, including those martyred in the great tribulation will be raised up from the dead and glorified immediately after the tribulation and before the wrath of God. And we will reign and rule with Christ during his kingdom and we will be priests of God.

Who will we rule over and to whom will we be priests? Remember there will be mortals who survive the time of God's wrath. Isaiah 13:12 and 24:6 reveals that there will be those who survive. The Scripture says a few. Now there are about 7 billion people on the earth right now. So a few can certainly mean at least a million or more.

In Matthew 25 Jesus spoke about judging the nations and allowing some to enter the kingdom. Isaiah 65:20-25 tells us that these people will experience life as all of us do now. They will grow, mature, marry and have children. And because there will be no war and the world will be renewed and people will be healed of diseases and there will be plenty of food, people will live for hundreds of years as they did in Genesis.

All of these people will need to be taught God's Word and they will need to be governed. This will be the job of the glorified believers. At the end of the millennium the population will have increased around the world so much that those who are deceived by Satan to rebel against Christ will be as numerous as the sand of the sea.

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth,

Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. ⁹ They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where [b] the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.
(Revelation 20:7-10)

This is astonishing isn't it? Why is there a need for a thousand year reign of Christ? Why doesn't God just establish the new heavens and earth? A thousand years of peace and blessing will show that with Satan's release the diagnosis of the human heart is true. We are all fallen sinners who even with the peace and blessing of the kingdom are capable of being deceived. We are all fallen sinners desperately in need of the saving grace of God.

Very few people today are willing to believe this. Ask just about anyone, especially those people who consider themselves sophisticated and enlightened and they will tell you that people are basically good. And when they do bad things it is because of their being poor or uneducated or they had bad potty training. The concept of people being sinners is old fashioned and simply ignorant they will say. But the revolt at the end of the millennium will prove that Jeremiah the prophet was right when he said, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"⁵

The thousand year reign of Christ will be a time of peace. There will be no more war.⁶ There will be righteousness and justice.⁷ Wild animals will be harmless.⁸ The planet will become a beautiful paradise.⁹ People will live to be 700, 800, 900 years old. Isaiah 65:20. Still there will be sin in the millennial kingdom. This is why Jesus will rule with a rod of iron.¹⁰

But as Scripture declares, Satan will be loosed from the abyss. And he will gather the disgruntled to rebel.¹¹ But the army of God and Magog will be destroyed. Gog is a name or title for a leader. And Magog is the general area of

⁵ Jeremiah 17:9

⁶ Isaiah 2:4; 9:6, 7

⁷ Isaiah 11:3-5;; Psalm 72:1-7

⁸ Isaiah 65:25

⁹ Isaiah 35:1, 2, 6, 7; Ezekiel 36:33-36

¹⁰ Psalm 2:9

¹¹ This final rebellion is prophesied in Daniel 11; Zechariah 14:1-11 and Ezekiel 38, 39

what is now Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The Devil will be cast into the lake of fire.

The lake of fire is the last description in the Bible of final punishment. It stands for the same ultimate destiny, which in the gospels is called by Jesus "Gehenna" wrongly translated as "hell." Gehenna was the garbage dump outside of Jerusalem where refuse and the bodies of criminals were consumed by fire.

The words "tormented day and night forever" are not to be understood as literal, constant, non-stop torment. In verse 14 we will read that "Death and Hades" or death and the grave will be cast into the lake of fire. And this lake of fire is called the second death. 2 Thessalonians calls the final punishment "everlasting destruction." Psalm 37:38 states that the final punishment is destruction. All through the Bible the ultimate destiny of Satan and unrepentant sinners is to be annihilated.¹² Now the remaining verses bring us to the sobering scene of the final judgment.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it,
from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.
And there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the
dead, small and great, standing before God, and books
were opened. And another book was opened, which is
the Book of Life.

And the dead were judged according to their works,
by the things which were written in the books. ¹³ The sea
gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades
delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were
judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death
and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second
death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life
was cast into the lake of fire.
(Revelation 20:11-15)

The scene begins with a great white throne. It is great because it is the ultimate judgment seat. It is the highest court in the universe. It is called white because it is pure and holy. This is a court of absolute and perfect justice. In verse 12 the word "God" is omitted from the best Greek manuscripts. The word "throne" should be there to replace the word "God."

¹² Proverbs 10:25; Psalm 73:18; Malachi 4:1; 2 Peter 2:12; Philippians 3:19; John 3:16

It will be the Lord Jesus Christ who sits on the throne to judge. In John 5:22 Jesus said, "...the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." Acts 17:1 declares that the world will be judged "in righteousness by the Man" God "has ordained." And "He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead."

And from Christ's presence heaven and earth will flee. In other words this sin contaminated world will go out of existence. In his second letter Peter tells us the heavens will be dissolved being on fire and the elements will melt with fervent heat.¹³ This suggests that for a time all humanity will be removed from the earth to some celestial realm. And all the dead, from the time of Adam till the end of the millennium, who were not in the first resurrection will be raised from the dead for the great white throne judgment.

And all these people to be judged will be judged according to their works. Our works reveal the condition of our hearts. Our works and deeds reveal what we believe. And all of those whose names are not in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire and will perish in the second death.

You can do so many wonderful things in life. You can win gold medals at the Olympics. You can earn a PhD. You can become wealthy. You can become a great scientist, artist or politician. But if your name is not in the book of life it was all for nothing.

Now the question comes up "What about those who never heard the good news of Jesus Christ? Isn't it unfair to condemn someone who never heard the good news?" Here is the answer to those questions from what I understand of the Bible. In Genesis 19 before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah Abraham asked God, "Would you destroy the righteous with the wicked?"¹⁴ And the answer was no.

In psalm 145:17 we are told that "Yahweh is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works." And Hebrews 11:6 declares that God "is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." God will deal justly and righteously with every man and woman who has ever lived. This is a sobering matter to be sure.

As believers we have such a wonderful and glorious hope. We will see this in the final two chapters of Revelation. And our hope should fill our hearts with joy and motivate us to live for Christ and honor him in all we do and say. And finally, this passage should remind us of the terrible need of the world around us. It ought to move us to be compassionate and loving. It should inspire us to pray

¹³ 2 Peter 3:12, 13

¹⁴ Genesis 19:23

that God would allow us to speak the truth in love so that others might be saved.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
(John 3:16)

Everyone has a decision to make about their final destiny. There is still time, there is still hope. The grace of God is still wide open.