

CHAPTER 20

(NKJV)

1. Satan Bound 1000 Years

¹ *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ² He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³ and 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.*

2. The Saints Reign with Christ 1000 Years

⁴ 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 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.

3. Satanic Rebellion Crushed

⁷ 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 the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

4. The Great White Throne Judgment

¹¹ 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.

Chapter 20 has four "sub-stories" going on. The first two deal with the thousand-year-reign, or the millennium, the second two have to do with the final rebellion and the final judgment.

Every image here is deeply embedded in Jewish theology and tradition. The story of God does not change, even over the 4000-year span of the Bible.

THE THOUSAND YEARS OF SATAN'S CAPTIVITY

The last chapter ***focused on humanity's part***; the ***beast*** is in effect, the human system without God, our ***fallen nature partnered and manipulated by Satan***. Now John ***speaks directly of Satan directly***, by all his names and images.

The main focus of Satan's binding is that he is restricted from deceiving. Chapter 19 spoke of a battle of which the beast, and all those directly associated with it are thoroughly defeated. There are two possible explanations for the nations that exist in chapter 20:

1. Chapter 20 is simply ***the same battle from a different perspective.***

Humanity as a whole, isn't involved in the last battle, only those who openly rebel. So, there is a remnant left to repopulate the earth.

2. Or the events of chapter 20 ***happen immediately after*** chapter 19.

Everything considered, the latter seems far more plausible.

Along with the binding of Satan comes...

THE 1000-YEAR REIGN OF CHRIST

Before mentioning the modern takes on this period, it would definitely help to look at *the origin of this prophecy*. As we mentioned this morning, this goes back into the *Old Testament*.

The belief in a millennial age has always been tied to the Jewish belief in the Messianic promise. It's not surprising that the hope in a Messiah doesn't take root until *after* Israel has failed miserably in its own efforts. During the great exile in Babylon, we find this in Daniel:

Dan 2

(NKJV) ⁴⁴ And in the days of these kings the **God** of heaven will **set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed**; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

Dan 7

(NKJV) ¹⁴ **Then to Him was given dominion** and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion.

The original Jewish hope was in a Messiah, whose kingdom would rule the world forever. The understanding was that Israel was this global kingdom.

After Israel miraculous deliverance from Babylon, the understanding of the Messianic promise began to change. Some *five centuries later*, around 100 B.C., the *concept was that the Messiah would involve a limited reign on this earth*. (2 Baruch 40:3). The thought was that this world was too evil to be the eternal place of God's kingdom, so it would be replaced in a final apocalypse in which all the forces of evil would be destroyed.

The Rabbinic teaching *speculated on several lengths of time* that this limited reign might last. The most common was that it would follow in the timeline of creation. A traditional belief was based on the literal time of creation, which many Rabbis taught as 7,000 years.

7000 years was based on Psalm 90:4 says "One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Based on that, the Rabbinical teaching saw *each day as 1000 years*, and thus, the *Sabbath rest then being 1000 years*. The Messiah's limited reign on earth would correspond to the first cosmic Sabbath.

This line of thinking was still around at the time of Christ. We find that Peter reflects this same thinking (2 Peter 2:8-13) when he joins the idea of **Ps. 90:4** and "**The Day of the Lord**" in which "*the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat.*"

Throughout Old Testament times, the Messianic understanding evolved, but the basic concept remains: God would come to this earth and reign in a *final consummation* with His people only then is eternity ushered in.

As the Christian church wrestled with the imagery of the millennial reign of Christ, it eventually took on *three different understandings*. There is:

The Premillennial view-

This view holds a very ***literal interpretation***, and is what was held by the early church. In a nutshell: **Christ would come before the millennial period.**

Traditionally, the Christian dead would rise at this time and those still alive would be caught up in the air with Him, as it's written in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, and 1 Corinthians 15:52.

1 Thess. 4

(NKJV) ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. ¹⁶ For the **Lord Himself will descend from heaven** with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the **dead in Christ will rise first**. ¹⁷ Then **we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them** in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

After the millennial reign, there is a **second resurrection** of the unbelieving and a final judgment of the unbelieving, from the great white throne. The second view is...

The Postmillennial view-

The view differs in that **Christ's return is after the millennium**. The prophecy is seen a little more figurative. The millennium is seen as the time of ***the Gospel as it triumphs in the present age***. It's no surprise that this view was the common view when the church was at its zenith of power in Europe and expanding throughout the world. It seems very probably that the physical church was the Messianic Kingdom.

In both these views, the ***1000 years, may or may not be seen as a literal period*** of time. For example, ***1000 is the cube of 10, the number of completeness***. We have seen the imagery of numbers all through the Revelation, so it is not unreasonable to see the millennium as simply, a ***perfect season of time*** and not necessarily a literal 1000 years.

The Amillennial view-

Amillennialists do not believe in a literal millennium. As the Age of Enlightenment gained momentum, popular thought looked for a more "reasonable" explanation of the concept. The result was the believe that the concept of the millennium was entirely symbolic. It simply represents the entire time between the life of Christ on this earth and His second coming. They usually see the first resurrection being the new birth of the believer, that is the believer's rising from the death of sin. In effect, there really is NO MILLENIUM at all!

All three views are held in orthodox thinking today; so what should we think?

The details in Revelation seem far too specific to be entirely figurative.

For example: ***The chapter speaks of those "beheaded for their witness."***

The term used here actually means, executed with an axe. At the time of John's writing, the main ***means of criminal execution was actually, to be beheaded with an axe***. In time, it became beheading with a sword. But the point was, the chapter spoke of those who held to their witness, even to the point of death. In time, this category of believers was believed to include, not just the **martyrs**, but the **confessors**; that is, those who suffered great loss, *other* than their lives.

As it is written; we see that ***only this group of Christians reign with Christ on earth***. After the thousand years, there is a **general resurrection** of the rest of humanity.

THE BOOK OF LIFE & JUDGMENT

The books (plural) are opened and each is **judged according to their deeds**. As we discussed this morning; this doesn't mean that people *earned* their salvation in works, but rather, the works *reflected or proved* who they actually are, or are not in Christ.

And as we also discussed this morning, **THE BOOK OF LIFE was a concept that has endured since the early days of the Old Testament.**

The imagery of the lake of burning sulfur also finds its roots in the Old Testament. In the ancient days when Israel strayed far from God. They practiced the ways of Moloch. At its worst, the very children of the people were sacrificed on the arms of a bronze bull/man that was heated to a blazing temperature. In pain, the children would writhe off the arms and directly into the fire below. Loud chanting and music would be played to drown out the screams of the children.

In time, when Israel reformed, this valley to the south and west of Jerusalem was considered cursed and could be used for nothing but a burning dump. It was a vile place where only the useless and vile things were discarded to burn. It was known as the **Valley of the Son of Hinnom, or Gehenna**. Gehenna became the imagery of hell. **Hell in effect; is a cursed dump!**

Understanding this gives us a special sense of meaning in the destiny of the beast, that is the *community of humanity without God*, the false prophet, those with the mark of the beast, and Satan himself; they are the vile and useless who are discarded from the new order of creation. There is no place for such things!

Seeing such progression of thought doesn't take away from its divine origin, but rather, gives us context, it offers layers of meaning through human experience. If we don't understand the context, we are simply confronted with a jumble of mysterious symbolism we can twist any way we feel fit!

Chapter 20 speaks to the complete sovereignty of God, and yet, speaks to the freewill of each of us. God is not locked in mortal combat with evil, He is in complete control. Everything that is happening is In short: A central theme in chapter 20 is THE BOOK OF LIFE. The distilled truth of the Book of Life is that God is the ultimate authority in every respect, He owns the book, but we are in the process of writing our own destinies; being judged according to our deeds. Our deeds being the outward proof of, to what or who we have chosen to give our inner selves.

God has spoken to humanity in these terms for over 4000 years. There is no need to reinterpret what He is saying now.

DISCUSSION

- What points struck you the most in this chapter?
- How does the fact impact you; that all the imagery of this chapter evolved over time in the Old Testament?
- If someone asked you, how do I get my name in the BOOK OF LIFE; how would you explain it to them? (Fitting together the truths that we are -SAVED BY GRACE- and yet we are judged -ACCORDING TO OUR DEEDS?)
- How do you understand the Millennium? Which view is closer to your way of thinking: Pre-; post; amillennialism?