

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 5 September 1999

No. T0074

Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

Great Chapters of the Bible: Revelation 20

Showing the 'Millennium Bug' already travelling down through a time glass, a recent government advertisement warns everyone with a computer to be ready for the date change. The message is clear; time is running out and to leave it any longer will be too late! Concerns over 'the millennium bug' lurking in some computers, like other problems, may upset us and make us feel uncomfortable. We'd much rather be thinking about the celebrations for the next 1,000 years, starting on 1 January. For example, attention here in London is taken up with the millennium dome at Greenwich. Y2K, as we now call it in modern day shorthand, has been planned to have very little to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. But His first advent was so important that a 6th century Scythian monk invented our present day calendar. He called the year of Christ's birth 'Anno Domini 1', so we know that we have had two Gospel millennia. We should be praising God for His long suffering!

Now in Revelation chapter 20, because God's plans are all about Christ, we don't find the 3rd millennium AD, but The Millennium. (The expression "the (or a) thousand years" occurs six times in the chapter.) It's about Christ's universal kingdom which is brought in by His second advent. In describing to us this most important event of prophecy, this great Bible chapter concludes with the description of the final judgement of men. The Gospel, like the recent publications on the millennium bug', separates fact from fiction. It warns us that there is Hell to avoid, and it tells us of the way to Heaven.

God has a prophetic calendar. It does not follow man's calculation of years. 'The Millennium' certainly will not start on 1 January next year, although it's probably coming soon afterwards! We find from the book of Revelation that there are some preliminary things to happen here upon earth before the second coming of Christ to reign in power and great glory. The major part of the book of Revelation, chapters 4-22, tell about these events of the prophetic future, which span a period of at least 7 years. This period of time, called 'The Great Tribulation' from our Lord's description of it in Matthew 24, will not commence until after His coming into the air to catch away His Church, as we are informed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Every true Christian will be included in this event, 'The Rapture'.

At Revelation chapter 17, a chronological sequence starts in which God is seen establishing His rights by the overthrow of that which is both evil and false. This sequence ends in the beginning of chapter 21, with the new heavens and the new earth, into which all believers pass when time ends and eternity begins. In chapters 17 and 18 He disposes of the false Church on earth, replacing it with the true Church, at the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb" in heaven in chapter 19. Jesus then appears from heaven as the Warrior King to put down the world-wide rebellion at 'The Great Supper of God'. Our chapter 20, deals with the last events both of time and of the present universe.

The two subjects of chapter 20 are The Millennium, and The Great White Throne Judgement.

The Millennium, in verses 1-10

The Bible, especially the Old Testament prophets, gives much detail about this kingly reign of the Lord Jesus Christ upon earth. Daniel fits it into the whole scheme of prophecy when in chapter 2 verses 34 and 35, after the succession of world empires represented by the image, he writes: "You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." The interpretation is given in verse 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." But Revelation 20 gives some clarity on what will happen at the start, during, and at the end, of this climax of all world governments. Now there are 4 topics about 'The Millennium' here:

1. Satan is bound.
2. The reign of Christ.
3. The First Resurrection.
4. The Final Rebellion.

First, verses 1-3 record how *Satan is bound*. In Isaiah 2: 4-5, we find the way in which the Lord will rule. "He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." The answer to the question: 'why do nations go to war?' is supplied in Revelation 20 verse 2. Satan is deceiving them, as he does with so many other issues in our present world. Therefore he must be put out of action for mankind to enjoy lasting peace, safety and prosperity. Christ uses an angel to arrest, chain and imprison the Devil in the bottomless pit - the Abyss, where according to Luke 8:31 and 2 Peter 2:4 all Satanic evil is held, shut up and restrained until their final condemnation to the Lake of Fire.

See how verse 2 symbolically describes, and then names this evil person.

- He is "the dragon" - a ruthless, relentless, crushing power, always against God and His people;
- He is also "that old serpent" - his activities are unchanged since the beginning of history, when at the Fall he deceived Eve as we find in Genesis 3:13. "The Devil" means 'he who deceives'; and 'Satan' means 'the opponent of God'.

The second topic is *The Reign of Christ*, in verses 4-6.

Numerous references to the Kingdom in the Old Testament describe the beauty, splendour and glory of this time of the earth's pure happiness. I can only mention a few. Of the many Psalms, 72; Isaiah 11:1-10, and 65:10-25; Zechariah 14:9, 20 and 21. Romans 8:21 describes it as "the glorious liberty of the children of God". In verse 4 of Revelation 20, all God's own are collected together to live and reign with Christ. They are:

- Believers of the church age, who sit on thrones, and are identified from 1 Corinthians 6:2-3;
- Tribulation martyrs, "who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus, and for the word of God". These are found under the altar in the 5th seal judgement of chapter 6.
- Then other saints of that period "who had not worshipped the beast, or his image, and had not received his mark upon their foreheads or on their hands". Their faithfulness in resisting this great power of evil (see 13:15) is rewarded. Many may have been casualties for the faith, but they are not forgotten by God: they reign with Christ for 1,000 years.

The *First Resurrection* is the third topic, again in verses 4-6. These verses show that "the first resurrection" is a collective term for all believers who are raised to life in heaven before the millennial reign of Christ. That which started with the resurrection of Christ Himself, and continued with the Rapture, is here concluded. 1 Corinthians 15:23 makes it clear "...Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming". The Lord Himself also spoke about this event in John's Gospel 5:29 as "the resurrection of life", and distinguished it from "the resurrection of condemnation". The latter is covered by the statement in verse 5 of Revelation 20: "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the 1,000 years were finished". All of these statements dispel the popular myth of a general resurrection. Verse 6 declares the blessedness of taking part in the first resurrection, and it notes these saints are 'priests', echoing the worship of God and The Lamb found chapters 1, 4, 5, 11 and 19.

The *Final Rebellion* in verses 7-10 is the last topic about 'The Millennium'. A mysterious statement occurs at the end of verse 3 concerning the restriction placed upon the binding of the Devil. It says: "till the 1,000 years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while". We have no information as to why this must be, but in verses 7-9 we see him unchanged in character, back into action in every part of the earth. According to Psalm 81:15, the generations of people who populate the earth during 'The Millennium' have given only 'feigned obedience' to the King; immediately they are deceived and rebel. In scenes reminiscent of the pre-millennial events of Armageddon, these confederate hordes, like Gog and Magog in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39, advance to Jerusalem to besiege the saints. But God consumes them with fire from heaven in one decisive act of judgement. The Devil himself meets his final end, cast forever into the Lake of Fire. There he joins the leaders of the pre-millennial revolt: the beast, the world political dictator, and the false prophet, the Antichrist. As a trinity of evil they had wrought havoc on mankind and established lawlessness during the Great Tribulation, following the Devil's eviction from heaven (see 12:7-13:18).

Now we come to our second subject: **The Great White Throne**, verses 11-15.

In this solemn scene we find answers about the final judgement of mankind. Who is the judge? It is God, so righteous that He causes the present universe to flee away. As it ends, time finishes and eternity starts. So when is the session? It is at the very end of time. Who are there? Verse 12 tells us it is 'the spiritually dead' who are summoned to stand before His awesome yet pure throne. This is "the resurrection of judgement" referred to earlier.

Can I and every other person avoid this judgement? Yes, by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for He says in John's Gospel chapter 5:24-29: "Most assuredly, I say unto you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has

everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgement also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation". These words of the Lord Jesus Christ "shall not come into judgement" show it is impossible for any believer to be at the great white throne. It is for the spiritually dead, all who die in their sins, which separate them from God. They are people throughout history who have never had true faith in the living God.

Is it a righteous judgement? It is both exacting and fair. The books of works are obviously a symbol of the divine record of every thought, deed and action of these people; and nothing has been missed. On the other hand, the Book of Life represents a register of those who have received life from God because of their faith in Him. This book is checked to leave nothing overlooked. But again it gives us the assurance that the redeemed cannot be present at this session. The judgement is also comprehensive - none is missed from unbelieving Cain to those of the last battle of verse 8.

Who are "the dead" and where do they come from? They are "small and great" - that is, all types of people raised from all the places of death.

- From the sea - the sepulchre of buried nations - in both a physical and a symbolic sense;
- From death itself - the place of the bodies of the dead, the grave;
- From Hades - the home of the departed spirits of the dead.

What is the sentence? First of all, in verses 14 and 15, the last great enemies of mankind, Death and Hades, are thrown into the Lake of Fire. Then the last verse of our chapter states that everyone who was resurrected to this session also finds his place in that same Lake of Fire.

What is the "lake of fire and brimstone"? Commonly known as 'hell', verse 14 describes it as "the second death". This can only mean eternal banishment from God. It also is a real place - of everlasting torment and punishment, as the words of the Lord Jesus "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched", spoken three times in Mark 9, verify.

But what kind of people find themselves assigned to this place "reserved for the devil and his angels"? The answer is not here in chapter 20, but in chapter 21:8. They are described in 8 ways:

- "The cowardly" - those who feared the Almighty but who were not persuaded by the Gospel message;
- "The unbelieving" - the most numerous of all, they would not believe the Gospel about God and His love;
- "The abominable" - all that are morally, religiously, and physically filthy in God's sight.
- Then there are "murderers", "the sexually immoral" and "sorcerers" - those who dabbled with spirits and practised witchcraft, spiritualism, devil worship, and the like.
- "Idolaters" - are worshippers of false gods, worshippers of the sun or nature, and all who put man or the things of earth first in their lives.
- Finally "all liars" - of every degree, kind and character.

Why do we find them here described in 21:8, immediately following the vision of the new heavens and the new earth, the eternal state - the place of blessedness of all believers? Because the word of God wants to make it absolutely clear that these final destinies are permanent and cannot be exchanged.

In coming to the end of my talk, I feel that our study compels me to urge any amongst our listeners today who have not yet turned to Christ for salvation to believe on Him, so that you will be "saved from wrath through Him", who "died for our sins".

Let us close with prayer: Lord Jesus we thank You that Your words about believing and not coming into the judgement have brought us the reassurance of salvation once more. How very worthwhile it is to believe on You! We pray today that many will hear and believe the Gospel, that all will be warned to flee from the judgement to come. We also thank You that You have blessed us and that You will soon take us to heaven. Then You will bring us with You into the glory of Your coming kingdom, to share in Your reign. Amen.

Please Note: We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.