

LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE MILLENNIUM AND THE JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT WHITE THRONE (Lecture 20)

IT is often said by those who object to the doctrine of an earthly Millennium, that the term itself is not found in the Bible. They insist that neither in the Old nor in the New Testaments do we ever read of a millennium, and they argue from this that the teaching is man-made, not derived from the Word of God.

We might reply that the mere fact that a certain term is not used in Scripture does not necessarily prove that the doctrine for which the term stands is not taught there.

- The word *Trinity* is not found in the Bible, but all sound Christians admit the doctrine of three persons in one God.
- The word *substitution* is not there either, but it is written, “**He was wounded for our transgressions,**” and that is substitution.

Where will you find the terms Eternal Sonship, Deity, Fall of man, Depravity, Incarnation, Impeccability (as applied to Christ), and many more of similar character? Certainly not on the pages of the Authorized Version of our English Bibles. But all these terms mentioned stand for great truths unmistakably taught in the Book, and are a vital part of the teaching of Christianity. So the mere omission of a title or name of a doctrine does not prove the absence of the doctrine itself, nor does it prove that it is but man-made.

However, we are not shut up to reasoning of this kind in regard to the Millennium, for the word in question is but the Latin equivalent of an expression that is found six times in the chapter that now demands our attention.

It simply means *a thousand years*; just as a century means one hundred years, or a jubilee indicates the expiration of fifty years.

A millennium, then, is a time-period. It does not necessarily carry with it any thought of perfection or happiness, nor of an era of manifested divine government. Six millenniums have almost elapsed since God put man upon this globe, and there is another millennium and a fraction yet to run ere the course of time is finished. That last thousand years is the period with which we are now to be occupied, and I trust to show that it is the predicted kingdom age of the prophets, and the “**dispensation of the fulness of times**” of the New Testament. It is not only in what some have called an obscure passage in the Revelation, that we read of this “good time coming,” but it is taught everywhere in Scripture.

The binding of Satan, the arch-foe of God and man, is the first notable event of this reign of righteousness. The seer says:

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit (or, the abyss) and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled, and after that he must be loosed a little season” (vers. 1-3).

Without attempting to explain all the symbols here used, it is enough to say that the passage very definitely indicates that there is a coming time when men will no longer be deceived and led astray by the great tempter who, ever since his victory over our first parents in Eden, has been the persistent and malignant foe of mankind, and by whose wiles untold millions have been defrauded of their birthright privileges. If men sin during the millennium it will not be on account of having been deceived. It will be simply because of self-will, and the yielding to the lusts of their own hearts. For we need to remember that the kingdom age is not to be a dispensation of sinlessness. There will be some, even in that blessed time, who will dare to act in defiance of the will of God, but such will soon be dealt with in condign judgment. Such cases will, I take it, be very exceptional, but Scripture makes it plain that there will be offences even when God’s King reigns over the earth.

In the present dispensation of grace, those who will live godly in Christ Jesus suffer persecution - righteousness suffers. But in the Millennium righteousness will reign: “**A King shall reign in righteousness.**” In the eternal state, which follows the Millennium, righteousness will dwell. It will be at home, and every adverse thing will be forever banished from the new heavens and the new earth.

Daniel prophesied of the time coming when “**the saints will possess the kingdom.**”

To this agree the words of the 4th verse:

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the Beast . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

We have here, if I understand the passage aright, the last cohort of the first resurrection. With our Lord Himself, and the saints raised at the rapture of the church, and the witnessing remnant that were slain, and raised up in the last, the 70th week of Daniel, they all share in the “*administration of the fulness of the seasons,*” as the late Wm. Kelly explained the expression rendered in our Bibles “**the dispensation of the fulness of times.**”

These saints appear in glory with the Lord, but we are not to understand by that that either He or they are to return to earth to live. Their relationship to the earth will be, I presume, very much like that of the angels in the patriarchal dispensation; able to appear and disappear at will, and exercising a benevolent oversight on behalf of those who live in this scene.

“Unto the angels hath He not put into subjection the world to come whereof we speak.”

That world will be subjected to the Son of Man, and associated with Him will be all who have shared with Him in His rejection. These are the throne-sitters first mentioned. With them will be the rest of the tribulation saints, who will suffer death rather than deny their God in the awful days of Antichrist’s ascendancy.

Their rapture will be when the Lord appears for the establishment of the kingdom.

“But the rest of the dead,” we are told in the verse that follows, **“lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.”**

This does not militate against the teaching already advanced that the first cohort of the first resurrection will be summoned from their graves prior to the tribulation period, and the second in the midst of that time of trouble: but we have here a summing up. All of these classes together make up the first resurrection - the resurrection of life; which is thus distinguished from the resurrection of judgment. Between these two will elapse the entire millennial age. The unsaved will remain in their graves until the heavens and the earth pass away. Their souls in Hades (the state between death and resurrection), and their bodies in the grave, they await the day of judgment at the end of time.

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (ver. 6).

This is the kingdom described in such glowing terms by Isaiah, who throughout his entire prophecy sees, through faith’s telescope, the glorious time when Israel and Judah shall be one people in their own land, restored in soul to God, dwelling in peace every man under his own vine and fig-tree, and the glory of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea. He tells how even nature itself shall respond to Messiah’s rule, and the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. The brute creation too shall be delivered from the curse. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all God’s holy mountain. The lion shall eat straw like the ox. The lamb shall lie down with the lion, and **“a little child shall lead them.”** All nations will then ask the way to Zion; and Jerusalem shall become the metropolis, not only of a rejuvenated Palestine, but of the whole earth.

Jeremiah takes up the same happy strain, and foresees the God of Israel sending “**fishers**” out into the sea of the nations, fishing out His people no matter where they may be hidden, and bringing them back to the land of their fathers. He sees the city built again and inhabited by a peaceful, happy nation under the reign of the righteous Branch whom God has promised to raise up unto David, and “**in his days, Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**”

Then they shall no longer need to “**teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know Him, from the least to the greatest of them.**”

Ezekiel adds to the wondrous story, and tells of the Spirit being poured out from on high, and describes the service of the regenerated Israel, a priestly nation, through whom the law of God goes forth to all the lands of the nations. He depicts the millennial temple, and even tells us how the land is to be divided among the tribes, and does not close his remarkable book until he can say, “**The name of the city from that day shall be (Jehovah-Shammah) - THE LORD IS THERE.**”

All the visions of Daniel’s companion-apocalypse conclude with the bringing in of the fifth universal kingdom; and this he tells us is the kingdom of the Son of Man, which is to displace every other, and is to stand forever.

This is the Stone cut out without hands that falls upon the feet of the Gentile image and grinds it to powder, and then becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth. This is the kingdom conferred upon the Son of Man by the Ancient of Days, when the bodies of the beasts (symbolizing the four great empires that have borne rule over all the civilized earth) shall be cast into the burning flame.

Hosea shows how Messiah would come in lowly grace, but, rejected by Israel, would go and return to His place until they acknowledged their sin, and would seek His face, when He will return to restore their souls and to ransom them from the power of the grave, bringing in everlasting righteousness, and making them a blessing to all nations.

Joel sees the great tribulation in all its intensity, but beholds the glory that shall follow, and predicts the outpouring of the Spirit, not on Israel only, but on all flesh.

Amos bears witness to the gathering again of the outcasts of Israel, and their re-settlement in their land under The Lord’s perfect rule.

Obadiah, who wrote the shortest of all the prophecies, though he speaks chiefly of judgment upon Edom, declares triumphantly, “**The kingdom shall be the Lord’s.**”

Jonah, alone of all the prophetic brotherhood, seems to have no reference to that day of The Lord’s power: yet we may learn through him how wonderfully God will own the testimony of Hebrew missionaries in the beginning of the kingdom age, as they go forth to spread the gospel among those who have not heard His fame, nor seen His glory.

But Micah joins with Isaiah in describing the time when **“the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and all nations shall flow to it,”** when **“the law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”** Then **“the nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks, and shall learn war no more.”**

Nahum predicts the judgments that shall befall the enemies of The Lord in the day of His preparation; while Habakkuk, standing on his watch-tower, sees the coming King bringing in the glory.

Zephaniah and Haggai point onwards to the restoration of Israel, and through them the blessing of the whole world, when the Lord their God is enthroned in the midst of them, and they serve Him with one consent.

Zechariah, the prophet of glory, gives minute details that no others have touched upon, and even tells of the provision to be made for children’s playgrounds in the restored capital of Palestine, for he says, **“The broad places of the city shall be full of boys and girls, playing in the broad places thereof”** (literal rendering). He sees every spot in Jerusalem holy to the Lord, and all nations wending their way thitherward from year to year to keep the feast of tabernacles. While Malachi completes the series and announces the soon-coming of the King, heralded by the prophet Elijah, to tread down the wicked and sit as a refiner of silver, to purify the sons of Levi, and to make His name great from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same.

Thus **“to Him give all the prophets witness,”** not only that through His name remission of sins is now to be proclaimed among all nations, but that He is to reign in righteousness over all the world, when He comes the second time to claim the inheritance which is His by Divine fiat, as Son and Heir of all things. Then will all the earth rejoice, for the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the tongue of the dumb shall sing, the lame man shall leap as the hart, sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and the Lord alone shall be exalted for a thousand glorious years!

“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever” (vers. 7-10).

This is indeed an amazing anti-climax to the story of human life on this earth. Who but God could have foreseen such an ending? But it shows us the incorrigible evil of the heart of man if left to himself. While Satan is shut up in the abyss, there will be many born into the world whose obedience to the King will only be feigned; the heart will not be in it; and when the devil is loosed for a little season at the end of the Millennium, he finds a host of these ready to do his bidding and to join him in the last great rebellion against Omnipotence.

It is the old story of Satanic hatred to God, and man's frailty told out again; but this time under the most favorable circumstances, so far as man is concerned. Therefore his sin is absolutely inexcusable.

- Tested in the garden of delight man broke through the one only prohibition laid upon him.
- Tested under conscience, corruption and violence filled the earth, and the scene had to be cleared by the deluge.
- Tested under the restraining influence of divinely appointed government, man went into idolatry, thus turning his back upon his Creator.
- Tested under law, he cast off all restraint and crucified the Lord of Glory.
- Tested under grace, in this present dispensation of the Holy Spirit, he has shown himself utterly unable to appreciate such mercy, has rejected the gospel and gone ever deeper into sin.
- Tested under the personal reign of the Lord Jesus Christ for a thousand years, some will be ready to listen to the voice of the tempter when at the close he ascends from the pit of the abyss bent upon one last defiant effort to thwart the purpose of God.

It is a melancholy history indeed, and emphasizes the truth that the heart of man is incurably evil. **"The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"**; therefore the need, in all ages, of a second birth through the Word and the Spirit of God.

"The heavens and the earth that are now," we are told by the apostle Peter, **"are reserved unto fire against the judgment of the great day."**

This pent-up fire breaking forth from the heavens will destroy the hosts of Satan's dupes, and purify the very globe itself, as once before it was cleansed by water. This closes the course of time and introduces the unending ages of eternity, during which the devil will be confined in the great prison-house of the lost, who have resisted God's mercy and spurned His grace.

What an end for him who was once **"the anointed cherub"** that covered the throne of God, but whose heart was lifted up because of his beauty, and who thus failing through pride became the most accursed creature in all the universe of God! Our Lord tells us that the devil **"abode not in the truth."** He is the prince of all apostates, and apostasy has ever been the great sin into which he has malignantly sought to lead the human race.

The judgment of the great white throne is the final scene ere the new heavens and the new earth are introduced. It is, as a careful study makes exceedingly clear, not **"the general judgment"** at the end of the world, as many have supposed, but the judgment of the wicked who, during Christ's reign of a thousand years, have been left in the realms of the dead. The righteous, who share in heavenly glory are to be manifested, as we have seen, at the judgment-seat of Christ, there to be rewarded according to their service while in this world; the living nations will be summoned to appear before the Son of Man when He comes in His glory at the beginning of the Millennium, as Matthew chap. 25 makes clear. The wicked dead are to be raised at the end of that reign of righteousness and dealt with according to their works. The condemnation now is that men reject the Lord Jesus Christ who has made full atonement for sin, in order that all may be freed from wrath through Him. But if He is rejected finally, of very necessity men must face the penalty of sin themselves.

Solemn indeed is the description of that last great assize.

“And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell (the unseen world, the abode of departed spirits) delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged everyone according to their works. And death and hell were cast (literally, emptied) into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (vers. 11-15).

The august Throne-occupant, we know from other Scriptures, will be none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, for **“the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son . . . that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father.”** He who once hung on Calvary’s cross is to be the judge of living and dead. With the first aspect of the judgment we have already been largely occupied. It is, as already mentioned, the doom of the wicked dead that is now engaging our attention.

When the throne is set, the heavens and the earth, as we now know them, shrink away, as though the material universe were awed by the face of Him who summons the dead to their accounting.

What a sea of faces will appear before Him in that solemn hour of tremendous import!

- All the lost of all the ages;
- All who preferred their sins to His salvation;
- All who procrastinated until for them the door of mercy was closed;
- All who spurned His grace, and in self-will choose the way **“that seemeth right unto a man,”** but was in truth **“the way of death”**
- All such are to be summoned to stand before that inexorably righteous throne.

No condoning of sin then; no palliating or excusing in that day: for the judgment of God will be according to truth, and every circumstance shall be taken into account. Nothing shall be overlooked. Therefore some will be beaten with many stripes, and some with few, according to the measure of light given and rejected. **“The Judge of all the earth shall do right.”** And there shall be no appeal from His decisions, for His is the Supreme Court of the Universe. “What a magnificent conception,” exclaims Thomas Carlyle, “is that of a last judgment! A righting of all the wrongs of the ages.” And, I may add, the tracing back of every evil act to its source, and the placing of responsibility for every offence against the moral law, where it belongs.

None will be great enough to escape that assize; none too insignificant to be overlooked. The dead, **“small and great,”** will be there. Even though their bodies had been buried for centuries, yea, for millenniums in the depths of the sea, they shall come forth at His bidding, who when He speaks will not be denied. Death, the grave which has claimed what was mortal of man, his body, will give up its prey. Hades, the world unseen, will surrender the undying spirits and souls of the lost. Body, soul and spirit re-united, the man will stand trembling before that judgment Bar.

The books of record will be opened. Memory will respond to every charge. The word of God too will be opened there; for Jesus declared that Moses' words and His words should judge men in the last day. And the book of life too will be unfolded there; for many in that vast throng had taken it for granted their names were there because, perchance, they had been listed on the roll of some church or religious society. Let them search and look. It will bear witness against them. The Lamb has not inscribed their name in that book. **“And whosoever was not found written”** in that book will be **“cast into the lake of fire.”**

Will any be saved who stand before the great white throne? Not one, if we read the account aright; for death and Hades are to be **“emptied into the lake of fire.”** All the lost, whose spirits and bodies they have held in durance so long, will be emptied out into the pit of woe. And, says God's Word, **“This is the second death.”** Death is the separation of body and spirit, we are told in James 2:26. The second death is the final separation at the lost from the God who created man. Like living planets, which, possessed of will, have swung out of their orbits, they dash off into the outer darkness, never to find their way back to that great central Sun.

The lake of fire is the symbol of sorrow immeasurable, of torment eternal. It is a divine picture intended to make the soul of the sinner shrink with dread as he contemplates the end of those who obey not the gospel. It is human character made permanent, abiding in eternal sin, and therefore under the wrath of God forever.

Not until Judas Iscariot, and John the beloved who wrote this book, clasp hands in heavenly glory, will the woes of the wicked come to an end. As to Judas, the Master he betrayed has declared, **“It were good for that man if he had never been born.”**

Were there salvation ahead at last, even after ages of suffering, as another has strikingly pointed out, even Judas might well thank God that he had ever been permitted to live. But over the portals of the lost they inscribed of old, “Abandon hope, ye who enter here.”

Now is the time acceptable. Now a gracious Saviour waits to catch the first breathing of repentance, and answers the feeblest cry of faith. Trifle not with His mercy, hope not for some vague second chance, but close with Christ now, and know for a certainty that you will have no part in the doom pronounced at the great white throne.

For the Lord Himself has said, **“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life”** (John 5:24).

~ end of chapter 21 ~

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