**THE THOUSAND YEAR REIGN OF CHRIST**

**REVELATION CHAPTER 20 – PART 1**

In Rev Ch 20 Jesus sets up His earthly kingdom. It is a period of peace and righteousness that will last for 1000 years. One thousand years is also known as a “millennium.” Therefore the name often given to Jesus’ 1000-year reign on the earth after the Tribulation is the Millennial Kingdom. READ Isaiah 11:6-9 how Isaiah describes the Millennial Kingdom of Rev 20.

*A QUICK recap of the Revelation study so far…* Apostle John exiled on the island of Patmos; receives a vision from Jesus about the end times; 2-3 letters to 7 churches of Asia dictated, practical for us living in the church age; 4-5 John translated up to heaven where he sees a glorious scene, pictures the rapture of the church (1 Thess 4:13-18, 1 Cor 15:51-52); 6-18 most of Revelation deals with the 7-year period called the Tribulation, awful time filled with God’s judgment; revival takes place primarily among the Jews, many are saved; antichrist rise to power, unholy trinity Satan, the beast (antichrist) and false prophet; 17-18 we get a closer look at the evil world system of the antichrist, “Babylon”; the false church, the great prostitute, and the political and commercial system filled with luxurious living for those who follow the antichrist; In Chapter 19 we observed Jesus Christ return to earth and wipe out the forces of evil at the Battle of Armageddon. We saw the demise of the beast (antichrist) and the false prophet, 2/3 of the unholy trinity are cast into the lake of fire. All their followers are killed by the sword from Jesus’ mouth. Satan’s fate will be discussed in today’s lesson, which brings us to Ch 20.

Before Jesus can establish His kingdom on earth, before the King can rule as describe in the Isa 11 passage, something must be done with Satan. He must be bound and restrained. Look at the first three verses…

V 1-3: Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

The last time we saw the key to the bottomless pit was back in Rev 9:1. “And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.” In that passage we noted that the star fallen from heaven to earth referred to Lucifer, also known as Satan (Isa 14). In Rev 9 Satan has the key to the abyss in his hand and he uses it to unleash demonic forces on the earth. In Rev 12 we flashed back in time to when Satan rebelled and was thrown down to earth. Here in Ch 20 v 1 we see that it is no longer Satan who holds the key, but an angel from heaven. Satan control over the powers of the air, over this world, his authority, has been removed.

The term “dragon” conjures up the picture of a fierce fire-breathing beast that destroys. This is an appropriate image given that Satan is, in fact the destroyer. “The devil and Satan” are interchangeable terms and the Greek word for both identifies Satan as our accuser and as a slanderer. “The ancient serpent” reminds us of the form Satan took as the originator of evil back in the Garden of Eden, Gen 3. Satan is seized and thrown into the pit for the 1000 years that Jesus will reign on the earth. Afterwards, God will release Satan for a short period of time. More on that later.

The stage is set for Jesus to be able to rule and reign on the earth without satanic influence. It will be a lot different world then than we have now!

V 4: Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

There is much speculation about who sits on these thrones and reigns with Christ. In the Bible, we see that God promises several groups that they would reign with Him on the earth. The first group is the O.T. saints. Daniel 7:27 says, “And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.’” The Dan 7 passage speaks, of course, about the coming King, that we know to be the Lord Jesus Christ. The “people of the saints of the Most High,” refers to O.T. believers. Daniel’s target audience was his fellow Jews. Those that remain faithful to Yahweh and trust Him are promised that they will reign in the Messiah’s coming kingdom.

This group, the O.T. saints were certainly at a disadvantage because they did not have the benefit of seeing Jesus come. All they could do was look forward to His coming. As Hebrews Chapter 11 points out to us, they had faith in the unseen… “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth (Heb 11:13). O.T. saints comprise the entire roll call of faith in Hebrews 11.

The second group that reigns with Jesus is the 12 Apostles. In Matt 19:28 Jesus tells His disciples, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

“You will sit on twelve thrones” refers to the original 11 disciples that Jesus Himself handpicked and who remained faithful to the end – the one exception being Judas who betrayed our Lord. It is my personal belief that the twelfth throne will be filled by the man Jesus called personally on the Damascus Road, the Apostle Paul. Paul refers to himself no less than 20 times in the N.T. as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The third group who reigns with Jesus is the N.T. believers. Back in Rev 3 Jesus promised that overcomers during the church age would sit on the thrones. His message was, “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne (Rev 3:21). First John 5:5 says that an overcomer is “the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” If you’re saved, born again, you are in this third group. This is exciting news for us!

There is a fourth group of people who will reign with Jesus. These are Tribulation saints. This is the group mentioned in the verse we just read, v 4. “They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” The other three groups, O.T. believers, 12 apostles, us N.T. saints already came back to life, already were resurrected, souls reunited with their resurrection bodies at the Rapture of the church. That took place back in Chapters 4-5 prior to the Tribulation.

By the way there is a fifth group who reigns with Jesus but they are not explicitly mentioned – those believers who have not yet died. Still in their mortal bodies which means they are like us – free will, ability to know and to choose right or wrong, procreate and do all the things we can do in our physical bodies. Even though Satan has been bound, sin still exists in the human heart.

V 5: The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.

“The rest of the dead” refers to all those who have not been resurrected up to this point. This speaks of those who died but were not in Christ, unbelievers. In the Revelation narrative there will be two resurrections. The first resurrection is the resurrection of the Tribulation saints, which occurs at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom, at the Rapture of the church. The second resurrection is the resurrection that occurs at the tail end of the millennium, after His thousand year reign on earth. Jesus describes the two resurrections this way: “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (John 5:28-29)

V 6: Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

This just underscores what we have just talked about. Those raised during the first resurrection, O.T. believers, the 12 apostles, N.T. saints, the martyrs of the Tribulation, will reign with Jesus in their resurrection bodies in His kingdom. This fulfills the promise Jesus made to overcomers in Rev 2:26-27: “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron…”

Let me clarify something about the period of time during the 1000-year reign of Christ on the earth. What I am about to say may surprise you. The prophet Isaiah describes this reign as a joyful period when righteousness will rule the earth (Isa 35:1-10). That is certainly not the case today is it? Today evil rules the earth! In the same way that evil prevails in our world today, so righteousness will prevail during the 1000-year reign of Jesus. That does NOT mean that evil will cease to exist during Christ’s reign any more than righteousness does not exist today. So during the millennial kingdom evil will continue to exist, but it will just not be as prevalent as it is in our world today. Jesus is going to rule with a rod of iron and the kingdom of light will be ushered into this world and those of us who are indeed overcomers, will be among the group given charge over portions of the world. Jesus will subdue all wickedness.

Now, at the end of the 1000-year reign of Christ something strange occurs…

V 7-8: And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.

We will pick it up here next week. So come back for that.

I wanted to sing a song today in closing about the 1000 year reign of Christ. It is interesting how few hymns, Christian songs there are about the Millennial Kingdom. There are some obscure hymns that speak about it but not many at all. We sing about everything else – Christ’s death and resurrection, His birth, God’s love and grace, even His judgment. And we sing songs about being with Him eternally in heaven and worshipping around the throne. But hardly at all about the 1000 year reign with Christ on the earth.

Isaac Watts hymn “Joy to the World” looks forward to this as a reality.