

10/01/21 by Ben M.
Read Revelation 20

We have been on a pilgrimage through this book of Revelation. And like any journey we see many things on the way. We've seen plagues, wars and real evil; people who know they are doing wrong but who carry on doing it. We see dark forces at work: lies, immorality, religious leaders and politicians who are really not doing what's right. We see natural and environmental disasters. In the first few chapters we see one of the great tragedies, dying churches. All those dark painful passages we see in the book are the backdrop to visions of God and his over-arching plan over human history. Ultimately, God's people are brought through these situations into a glad confession of Jesus as Lord and into the blessings he has reserved for them. Those who have been hostile to him and lived in ignorance also have to reluctantly confess Jesus as Lord and find his judgement on them for what they have done. These things come together in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation. Chapters 17-19 have been working up to the destruction of Babylon (code word for Jerusalem) in AD70, the centre of oppression of God's people.

Let's look at the first six verses that deal with what people call the millennium. There are many different views about these verses so forgive me if I misrepresent your views. One view is that the world is going to get worse and worse, evil is in the ascendance, and only at the conclusion of that will Christ come to rescue God's people and usher in a thousand years of his reign on earth with God's people. Another view is because of what Christ has done, Satan's ability to act is restricted and so the church is destined to make extraordinary progress so that the influence of the gospel will increase for a thousand years of gospel blessings so all the nations come under the influence of Christian teaching. Only at the end when the world is at its peak of god-fearing and Christ-loving will Christ return to cap his kingdom on earth. But there is a third view that says that millennium here is a literary device or a metaphor, a view consistent with the whole style of the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is reliant on metaphors, literary devices and similes to teach the church of this present age. Those who have gone before us are safe with Christ in glory and the church on earth is able to continue even though Satan is at large in the world, He is not able to prevent the church from doing its work of preaching, baptising, building people up, gathering around the Lord's Table. Although Satan is at large he is not able to derail the church.

The important point in verse three is the destruction of the city, Satan's capture and imprisonment is not the end of Satan. This comes out again in the next section. (v7-9). It is not the end of the danger presented to the world and the church. Ultimately Satan will muster his forces to deceive the nations and make an assault on God's people with perhaps renewed hostility and aggression. I want to make this point. Whatever view you take, the millennium is not heaven. Ultimately, Satan is still an opposing force. There will be trouble!

Some prophesied falsely that Jerusalem was invincible but there were others who looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:10) In Revelation 20:9 we get a clearer view of the heavenly Jerusalem. This is not the earthly, corrupt Jerusalem but the true Jerusalem, the invincible city that God Loves and protects. So, as we move into verses 7 to 9 we remember what Jerimiah said when he was

criticising the false prophets who were saying peace when there was no peace. (Jerimiah 6:14) Jerimiah was saying there is need to trust God because there is trouble ahead for the city of Jerusalem. There is no peace because Satan will take his opportunity again. When the Roman general, Vespasian, who was poised to attack Jerusalem, was called back to Rome after the death of Nero the prophets were saying, "See Jerusalem is invincible" Many Christians believed in that peace but were slaughtered when Titus (Vespasian's son) arrived in 70 AD and destroyed Jerusalem. The civilian death toll was greater than any other civilian death toll in the history of conflict in the ancient world. Over a million people died because they believed in the message of peace when there was no peace. They weren't citizens of the right city. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Instead of listening to Jesus when he warned them, (Matthew 24:4) They were not ready or willing to run, to escape.

But the city in verse nine, the city God loves, is indeed the city of eternal peace. It is attacked but no one and nothing can overcome that city. It is the city of God, the city of our salvation where we have our citizenship. Peace and safety are ultimately found in trusting Jesus Christ. The lesson is that, in times of relative peace, to remember we are not through the problems yet. Also, do not look back and think you can stay in Jerusalem doing your own thing, like lot's wife, but flee the city of destruction. Take the window of opportunity to leave and go to the place where the people who love Jesus gather. Know that you are secure in his kingdom. Our only hope is in the love of God. The fire of God consumes his enemies to protect his people.

Verses 10-15 contrast the ruler of the city with Satan and his forces that are doomed to destruction. This is Jesus sitting on his throne as judge. Who is his friend and who is his foe? Which city are you a citizen of? The truth about our real relationship will be writ large. Are we citizens of Christ's city, living within its protective walls or are we still under the influence of this dragon who dominates the hearts and minds of the people of the world?

Notice verse 10. "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." There is no release from this eternal and perpetual death and torment for Satan and all those who have loved this world and not loved Christ. But it is clear that those who do follow Christ have the promise of life because they are in the Lamb's Book of Life. They have turned to Christ in faith. It does not matter what your history or background is. You must get your name in that book! If you repent of your sin and trust Christ your name will be found in this book. If it is in that book rejoice and praise God with all of your heart. In Jesus you are secure and no one and nothing can take that from you. You are on your way to Heaven.