

CHAPTER 12

The Millennium

For this chapter you will need to read Revelation 20:1-10. This is the passage of Scripture upon which people's perception of the Book of Revelation rests. Commentators are categorized on their handling of the Book of Revelation by this one issue—are they premillennialist, amillennialist, or postmillennialist? Putting it simply, a premillennialist believes that Jesus will come physically on the earth, probably to a throne in natural Jerusalem, and will reign over our world for a thousand years. Amillennialists believe that the present age is the millennium. There is no special sign or wonder or growth necessary. It is the millennium, and Jesus could come back at any moment and usher in the end of all things. Postmillennialists believe that the church of Christ will increasingly triumph in the world and will bring in the

Kingdom before the King returns. That is, the millennial rule of Christ will be seen and experienced in our earth before Jesus comes again.

Seizing the Dragon

So to understand this passage let us look firstly at the dragon. We see an angel coming down out of Heaven, having the key to the abyss and holding in his hand a great chain; he seizes the dragon and binds him for a thousand years. In Job God describes two great beasts, a beast from the land and a beast from the sea. The beast from the land in chapter 40 is called Behemoth. The beast from the sea in chapter 41 is called Leviathan. Leviathan is the monster of the deep that is recorded and spoken of in Psalms and in the prophet Isaiah. He is also the beast from the sea described in the thirteenth chapter of Revelation. It is an amazing description, and the object of the exercise is that God wants to ask Job if he can overcome this great monster.

You would benefit at this point from reading chapter 41 of the Book of Job. You will see that Leviathan is quite terrifying! And in the light of his awesome appearance and his immeasurable strength, God asks Job these questions: "Can you catch him? Can you tie him up? Can you lead him on a leash? Can you deal with the terrible, awesome power of this beast from the abyss, this monster from the deep?" Of course, the conclusion we are forced to come to is that we are not even going to try! But this is only a picture of an even more fearsome dragon—the ancient serpent, the devil, the devourer, the accuser. He is intimidating to the people of God. There are believers in Christ who live in fear of the devil because

they know, as Job knew, that, humanly speaking, they have no hope against such great opposition. But God has bound up the dragon:

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-2).

The dragon has been caught! The very word seized conveys a kind of violence or at least determination. The angel coming down with the authority of God has all the ability to arrest the dragon in the midst of its evil work. He lays hold of and seizes the dragon. This is the God who seized you, the Christ who laid hold of you. Do you remember how Paul describes his conversion experience, declaring that his one desire was to lay hold of that for which Christ had laid hold of him? The idea behind that word is that he was seized. Christ arrested him. Jesus reached into his life and laid hold of him. When you were a rebel, when you were against Christ, when you went on your way breathing murder, as Paul did on the Damascus Road, Jesus broke into your life and seized you. You and I have been laid hold of by God. And the God who laid hold of us in grace and mercy is the God who has laid hold of the dragon for ultimate destruction.

As we read of the dragon, in Job, God interjects and speaks of His own power and authority, for it far exceeds every other power and authority. Our Lord Jesus has received a name that is above every name: "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*" (Matt. 28:18). Many believers need still to understand that the struggle in which we are engaged is an

unequal struggle and that the battle that is lined up on our planet is between an army that cannot lose and an enemy that cannot win. There is no question about the outcome, for the Lamb has conquered and the dragon has lost. Not only is the dragon caught—an unimaginable thing, for remember that Job stood in amazement to even contemplate that such a beast could be laid hold of—but the dragon's strength dissipates as the powerful hand of the angel of God lays hold of his scales, catches hold of his horns, puts his arm around his neck, and brings him into submission!

Satan Bound

The angel had in his hand a great chain. With it he bound the dragon for a thousand years. Now if we can understand when that happened we can come to terms with when the millennium began. Jesus said this:

In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house (Mark 3:27).

Jesus utters those words in the context of His miracle ministry. He is casting out demons and says, "*If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you*" (Matt. 12:28). But the reaction of people at that time is to accuse Him of casting out demons by beelzebub, the prince of demons. Jesus explains that that is impossible, because a house divided against itself cannot stand. He then goes into this description of someone coming to the strongman's house and tying up or binding the strongman; Jesus is showing us that when He embarked on His public ministry, when He came preaching the good news and working miracles, when

He started to cast out demons, it was a sign and irrefutable evidence that He had tied up the strongman. Listen to how Luke renders that same Scripture:

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils (Luke 11:21-22).

There is no denying that the dragon is strong and powerful. But one stronger than he has come and has tied up the strongman and has bound him with chains for a thousand years.

For... God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons [for some manuscripts, 'into chains of darkness'] to be held for judgment (2 Peter 2:4).

Peter is looking back at what God has done in history. Many of the angels who fell did not get free rein to roam about our world. They did not necessarily become the demon powers that affect and influence the lives of people and the affairs of nations. Some of the ringleader angels, angels bent on unspeakable evil, were sent to prison to await the Day of Judgment. They are not loose in our world. He did not send satan to that prison because satan is actually God's satan, and God had some use and purpose for him. But many of the "ringleader" angels were actually sent to hell and to prisons of darkness. Jude puts it even more dramatically:

And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these He has

kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day (Jude 6).

It may be, that we will have a part to play in that judgment because Paul tells the Corinthians, "*Do you not know that we will judge angels?*" (1 Cor. 6:3). We do not live in fear of those incarcerated angels. In fact, they live in fearful anticipation of the judgment that we will pass on them. But there are others out there, and what Jesus did when He came into the world was to start to bind up the principalities and powers.

Binding and Loosing

Let me take you to Matthew chapter 16, because not only is Jesus the great Master of destiny and history, He is the one who invites us to work with him in his ministry of overcoming the powers of evil. Here Peter gets a revelation of who Jesus is. I have said it before, but I will emphasize it again, there are too many Christians who are more concerned with finding out who the beast is, there are many Christians who want to know what the number is, and there are many people who want to understand all these deep things of satan—but the key to success and victory is to know who Jesus is!

This revelation comes to Peter:

"But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give

you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:15-19).

To those who are built on the foundation of the confession of His lordship, those who constitute his Church, Jesus is saying that He is giving them the keys of the Kingdom so that they can bind and they can loose. It is not that we are the instigators of what we bind and loose; we are the implementers of what God has already bound and loosed, and one of the things that He has already bound is the power of the enemy. If I may speak figuratively, he entrusts the great chain and the key to the abyss, which the angel held, to the Church. In chapter 18 of Matthew's Gospel Jesus speaks on how to correct errors in the church. It is interesting that these are the only two passages in the Gospels where the Church is mentioned. The first one tells us that He is building the Church on a foundation, and the second one is about how the Church is supposed to operate, how we are commanded to forgive one another and called to repent when we are wrong.

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:18-20).

He tells us that this is an activity of the Church. The two witnesses are there to bind and loose because He is with them. Just as He stood in the midst of the lamp stands, He is

with His people. Binding and loosing is what Jesus did. Binding and loosing is what we are called to do. The angel took hold of the dragon and bound him with a great chain, and that will not happen in some distant future, but has already happened 2,000 years ago. Through the cross Christ spoiled the principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them through the cross. There is a great hymn that celebrates this:

My heart and voice I raise,
To spread Messiah's praise;
Messiah's praise let all repeat;
The universal Lord,
By whose almighty word
Creation rose in form complete.
A servant's form he wore,
And in his body bore
Our dreadful curse on Calvary:
He like a victim stood,
And poured his sacred blood,
To set the guilty captives free.
But soon the Victor rose
Triumphant o'er his foes,
And led their vanquished host in chains:
He threw their empire down,
His foes compelled to own,
O'er all the great Messiah reigns

Benjamin Rhodes

Satan is bound; but if he was bound 2,000 years ago, does that mean he was released in the year A.D. 1000 because he has only been bound for 1,000 years? If he was only bound for

1,000 years and that was 2,000 years ago, where does that leave us today? It would be worrying unless when John says "one thousand" he does not actually mean a literal thousand. As we have seen, John uses numbers as symbols and not as sums. Sevens speak of completeness. Four has to do with the earth—the four corners of the earth. Twelve has to do with God's Kingdom, His government, and His redeemed people—there are 24 elders and 144,000 who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

These are numbers that convey completeness and fullness. One thousand is another number that occurs here and elsewhere. There are thousands and thousands and 10,000 times 10,000 angels. This is telling us that the angels are innumerable. The Psalmist tells us that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. That does not mean that when you get to hill 1,001 they belong to somebody else!

That is what the legalists and the literalists might say. But this is not a legalistic book, and it is not a literalistic book. It is a poetic book. It is a prophetic book. It is a book of sign and symbol, and so when the psalmist speaks of a thousand hills he means every hill everywhere, and when John speaks of 1,000, he is speaking about the whole of the age between Jesus' first coming and His second coming. One thousand is one of those numbers that conveys an ideal, not a calculated number. He is speaking of the age with a progressive expectation of the Kingdom's fulfillment.

When Jesus comes again, He is coming for a pure bride. When Jesus comes again, He is coming for a Kingdom. He is not coming back with a dustpan and brush to pick up the

broken pieces of His Church. He is coming back for a Church triumphant that has filled the earth with His glory. Satan is not only caught, he is chained and cast down. The angel took him, bound him, and threw him into the abyss.

There are many clues for us in the Book of Revelation about how the Kingdom operates. You know that the Kingdom has come, is coming, and will come. So we are experiencing the first fruits of the Kingdom, we are experiencing the foretaste, we have tasted of the powers of the age to come, and we are living in that overlap of the "is" and "is to come." We live here on earth, but our citizenship is in Heaven. We are members of his Kingdom even though it has not yet come in all its fullness. So the Book of Revelation also describes for us the fall of satan and the destruction of the evil one in those terms.

In chapter 12, when there was war in Heaven, we saw that satan was hurled out of Heaven down onto the earth. Here in chapter 20 we find that he was thrown down into the abyss, and later on we are going to discover in his final demise that he is thrown into the lake of burning sulfur. So there is a progressive defeat of the evil one. First, he is thrown out of the place of his authority; second, he is bound so that he cannot influence the nations; and ultimately, he is cast into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet already are. He will be utterly destroyed, but until he is utterly destroyed, he is completely defeated.

So here he is down in the pit and, as the angel throws him down there for 1,000 years, he locks and seals it over him. This is an interesting picture. We find satan seized, bound, imprisoned,

and cast down into the abyss, and the abyss sealed. It reminds me of what happened to Jesus, who was seized, bound, imprisoned, buried, and a seal put on the stone that covered the tomb. Death, however, could not hold Jesus, and He rose on the third day and is alive forever. Satan, while not able to rise, will be released from the abyss, but just for a short while.

It makes him angry to be released for only a short time after the thousand years are over, after the Kingdom has filled the earth with God's glory, after men have lived under the influence of the Gospel. Not all men will be saved. The Kingdom is bigger than the Church. Not everybody who lives under the influence of the Kingdom will be a member of the Church. Not everyone who walks in the light of the blessing of God that will manifest itself in our world in the last days will be born again. They will experience some kind of influence of sanctity because they are going to walk in the light of the glory of God. It is a little like an unsaved husband who is married to a believing wife. He is sanctified by it (see 1 Cor. 7:14). This does not mean he is born again. It means he gets some of God's blessing because he is married to her.

There is a sense in which unregenerate humanity will get the blessings of the Kingdom not because they are born again, but because they are living under the influence of those who are enjoying Kingdom blessings, because such blessings always overflow. In the generosity of God, He always gives you more than you can contain. But the reason God gives you more than you can cope with is that the overflow blesses somebody else. When the Kingdom comes, the world is full of the peace of God, not because everybody has beaten their swords into plowshares, but because everybody is under the influence of the

benefits of God's Kingdom. But there will always be people who, although they enjoy the benefits, actually hate the Kingdom. It is an amazing thing, but there will be those who live under the blessing and despise the blessing, because unregenerate man hates the light and loves the darkness.

So God allows Satan to be released for one final fling. But it is only for a short while, only until he is utterly overcome and destroyed. We do not need to live in fear of when that is going to happen. He will come with such lying that if it were possible, he would deceive the saints. But it is not possible. He will lead an army and surround the camp of God, the city God loves. That is not earthly Jerusalem, because the city He loves is the Jerusalem that is from above, that comes down from Heaven from God; it is the Church. The Church is a camp because it is always on pilgrimage, and yet it is a city because it always has a sense of permanence. Satan's great army comes against the heavenly city, against the Church. And God will just slay them in an instant. He will slay them with his breath. He will destroy them with a glance, and it will all be over for the evil one.

It is in this thousand-year period that the saints reign in newness of life, enjoying the first resurrection, having come out of sin and having been seated in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus. As we look at the descriptions of the millennial role of Christ and his risen saints, we are confronted with words and concepts that we are already familiar with. The martyred saints are raised, enthroned, and given authority. This is the first resurrection—when they are raised, by faith in Christ, when they are first born again (see Eph. 2:6). It is in this period that they, with Christ, will bring in the Kingdom

and establish His righteousness on the earth. The second resurrection—that of our bodies—takes place at the second coming of Jesus, after the thousand-year rule on earth. We also read here of the second death. Until Jesus comes again, all people will die physically. But at the judgment, unbelievers will be subject to a second death, one of eternal separation from the Lord. There is a simple equation that answers the puzzle of “first resurrection” and “second death” language: born once—die twice; born twice—die once. Those who are born again will not be harmed by the second death.

So, when is the millennium coming? It has already come. When did it begin? It began when satan was bound and when men and women were raised out of sin into the glorious life of the Lord Jesus Christ. This millennium life and rule will grow, increase, brighten, fill the earth with the glory of God, and bring in His Kingdom. Satan will rebel against it, and the rulers of this earth will say, “*Let us break their chains...and throw off their fetters*” (Ps. 2:3). But he who sits in the heavens laughs and says, “*I have installed My King on Zion, My holy hill*” (Ps. 2:6). His anger can flare up in a moment. And for those who rebel, his anger flares up, and they are consumed forever; but the righteous will be forever with the Lord.