

Approaching hoofbeats - The Book of Revelation

Sessions 9, & 10

Ch 20 The Millennium followed by The Judgment

The bottomless pit is mentioned in other places in the Bible (in Luke 8:31, Romans 10:7). This is the prison of unfathomable loneliness and darkness. Satan is bound here by a mighty angel along with other demons. They are released after 1000 years, which separate the two resurrections. At the end of the thousand years there will be a final rebellion, short lived, ending in the final judgment.

The simplest interpretation of the millennium is that there is to be a literal reign of one thousand years on the earth by Jesus when He returns. There are many passages of the Old Testament, such as Zechariah 12-14 which teaches that when Christ returns He will stand upon the Mount of Olives. The Mount will split in two and water will flow out east to the Dead Sea and west to the Mediterranean. The salt laden seas will then be healed. The Lion will lie down with the lamb and there will be a thousand year period of the benign rule of Christ. (See Isaiah 65:20, 11:6-9, Psalm 72:8-14, Zech 14:5-17.

Why will God inaugurate the Millennium? There is no explicit reason given in scripture. It may be that by the Millennium God will prove to mankind that the human race is not evil because of the devil, but by the wrong exercise of personal moral choice. If the devil had not existed, man would still have to prove himself by choosing the tree of life rather than the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Revelation 20 indicates that at the end of the Millennium, the Devil will be released from the bottomless pit and will once more deceive the nations. This is of course only possible to those who are unconverted. The point is that even the benign rule of Christ does not mean that He will force everyone to accept His rule through dictatorship, but rather through the force of His love. Man is free to choose and moreover he is what he is by deliberate choice not force of circumstances.

There are many difficult questions to answer, such as:

Q: How will believers with a new resurrection body live alongside sinners who are still with a mortal body?

A: In the same way as Christ appeared to the disciples after the resurrection.

Q: How will Christ rule?

A: Through the agency of the Spirit in His followers and through His saints who will administrate and rule with Him.

Q: Will He be constantly visible?

A: Probably not as He will have no barrier stopping His free movement between earth and heaven.

The questions are innumerable and the answers are only possible through speculation since the Bible does not say much. Fortunately the Bible does not make our understanding of the Millennium a key foundation or condition of salvation!

There are two other views which have a small number of followers:

Post Millennial beliefs

In the 19th century some believers thought that evangelism would be so successful that the whole world would be converted and that the thousand years reign would happen before the final time of trouble and Armageddon. This is Post (Latin for after) millennial and means that Christ returns after the millennium. Very few now believe this especially after the awful traumas of world war in the 20th century. 50% of the population of Texas is now Christian in the evangelical sense of the word, but millennial conditions have not dawned!

Amillennial beliefs.

According to this interpretation, the millennium is a symbol of the gospel age. This interpretation is the least credible since it would imply that Satan is presently bound; which given the holocaust and other horrors of war, as well as increasing evil, is hardly credible.

The final judgment of the world of men.

This day will be the first day in all of history when all who have ever lived will stand together in one group. None will be absent except the antichrist and the false prophet. All humanity will see each other, and this is the ending of the age when men are born and die. From this point on the number of human beings will be constant. There will be no more marriage between men and women. There will be no more children. The saints will judge angels - though when this occurs is not clear.

There are several key revelations describing The Day of Judgment, which are found in Rev 20 and Matt 24 and 25.

- It begins with the Church or House of God. 1 Peter 4:17.
Christ cleansed the temple at the beginning of His ministry (John 2) and will also cleanse His Church upon His return.
- The judgment will be severe against unfaithful stewards: especially pastors and Bible teachers: Matt 24:43-51. Here Jesus leads up to a description of judgment with three parables. The first is about the servant of the master of the house who mistreats the servants and eats and drinks with the worldly. That servant is dismembered and cast into hell with the unbelievers (v 51). The word used in this passage for household is the Greek word "therapeion" and is based on the word healing. It is the word used later for the healing of the nations. The intention of God is that the Church should be a house of healing

and not wounding. Christ received wounds in the house of his friends: Zechariah 13:6. The true ministry will produce an atmosphere of healing and those who disrupt this atmosphere will be judged severely.

- Judgment will be exercised against foolish virgins who do not prepare for the return of the Bridegroom. This is the second parable given in the description of judgment day: Matt 25:1-13. Who are the foolish virgins? Those who do not receive oil, (symbol of grace and the Holy Spirit) to nourish a flame of love for Jesus. They are followers but not lovers of the Lord Jesus and such will be judged.
- The use of the talents will be also the basis of judgment in the House of God. The Lord has given grace, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, wealth and money, countless servants and so on. The talents that God has given us are many and we are to take advantage of them and multiply them. Note that the word talent here does not refer to a special talent or ability, but to a huge gift that we don't deserve. God has sown into the earth through the death of His son and He expects a return, a harvest, a full reward. Believers must not hide the gospel or neglect to use the gifts that God has given us. These can be gifts of all kinds, but we are to live by faith and obedience and share what we have.
- The division of the Sheep from the Goats. This is not a division based on race or nationality!! The nations are gathered together, but when the Bible says the Judge will separate *them*, this little word refers to individual people and not nations.
- The judgment is based on works not beliefs! This is perhaps the biggest shock for believers because we know that we are saved through faith in Christ so how can the judgment be based on a loving attitude to those less fortunate than ourselves? The answer is simple: we are saved by faith, but judged by works!
How can this be? The answer is that religious people do good works to please God and be accepted by Him. But believers believe and trust in God and if this faith is genuine, there will be change in our conduct. James says that faith which does not affect actions, is dead faith and not living, justifying faith. God will not be deceived by religious hypocrites and the final judgment will be perfect justice. This should produce the fear of the Lord in all who consider and believe these things.

The Believers' judgment seat. 2 Cor 5:10.

If believers are unfaithful they will be judged with the unbelievers at the Great White Throne: Luke 12:46. Otherwise they will still appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive a reward for their faithfulness or some punishment for their neglect. When this judgment will occur is not made clear, but it can be assumed that it will be at the point of passing into the presence of the Master when this earthly life is over.

- Differing degrees of punishment will be given for those who knew the Master's will, but did not obey. The servant in the parable of Luke 12:47 received many lashes.
- There will be rewards of differing degrees for those who are faithful: Luke 19:16-19.

The fact of Hell.

One of the most fearful truths of the New Testament is the truth of hell. Believers as well as unbelievers may have difficulty grasping this terrible fact. Some believers have speculated that perhaps hell will annihilate the sinners so that they no longer exist (this doctrine is called annihilationism). Others have speculated that sinners in hell will be given the chance to repent, and that the pain of hell will produce this repentance. This doctrine is called universal redemption. Both conclude that there will be no hell after a period of time, and both appeal to the love of God as the reason that hell cannot last forever.

These two ideas however, are wrong for several reasons:

1. The Bible teaches that hell will be an eternity of pain: Rev 14:10-11.
2. These views are based on rationalism and speculation not the Word of God. In other words they are a blend of humanism rather than Christian teaching.
3. They do not take into account the awfulness of evil and its destructive power.

The Bible does not tell us everything, and if these things are hard to understand, then rather than contradicting God's Word with speculation, believers should trust God for things that they find difficult. God has given us all that we need to know. We know that He is loving and merciful and therefore we know that we will understand the bigger picture later in a fuller way. The key for us is to warn sinners of the awful danger that is hanging over them if they should die rejecting Christ and His offer of salvation.

What does the Bible teach about hell?

1. Sinners are raised from the dead and are sent to hell with a body: Rev 20:13; John 5:29.
2. There is the destruction of the body and the soul in hell: Matt 10:28.
3. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth in hell: Matt 13:42
4. There is everlasting fire in hell: Matt 18:8.
5. Hell is a place of outer darkness: Matt 22:13; 25:30.
6. It is a place of torment and raging thirst, and yet with clear understanding and wakefulness: Luke 16:19-24.
7. Hell is a place prepared, not for man, but for the devil and his angels: Matt 25:41.
8. Hell is a place where worms do not die: Mark 9:44. The images of fire and worms are consistent with the valley of the son of Hinnom or Gehenna. This is the traditional rubbish dump of Jerusalem and had fires constantly burning and heaps of rotting food swarming with maggots and worms.
9. It is a place of final and eternal separation: Luke 16:26.

Note that most of this teaching was given by Christ Himself and that the warnings were addressed to His followers first, and then to the world.

Ch 21-22 The Bride in the New Creation

The title of Jesus is here the Root and Offspring of David, reminding us repeatedly that Jesus was grafted into humanity to lift it to the eternal throne, to partake of eternal life. He is also given the title of the "The Bright and Morning Star" the brightest star in the sky. Does this mean Venus or the Sun?

Satan also was given this title, indicating that he was destined to be one of the beings most like the Son of God, partaking of His glory.

The Bride is revealed in all her glory in chapter 21. John is taken to a great high mountain where he sees the Bride the New Jerusalem. Here are her characteristics:

- Clothed in glory
- 12 gates open day and night
- 12 angels at the gates
- 12 foundations named after the apostles
- 1,500 miles square, in length, breadth and height
- 72 metre high walls – the equivalent of a 24 story building
- Made of gold
- The nations walk in the light of her
- This Bride is a vast international city of people in love with Jesus, beautiful, holy, redeemed people, living in light, life and love.

The last 2 chapters of the Bible mirror the first 2 chapters in Genesis; in that the first Creation is replaced by the New Creation. There are of course huge contrasts and indicates to the reader that there is not just a mere restoration of the condition of things before the fall, but a progression. God has made something better in the New Creation.

Here are some of the contrasts:

First Creation	New Creation
Seas and oceans	No sea
Day and Night	No night
Sun and Moon	No need of the sun

The implication is that divisions are abolished. There is no ocean separating people, and there is no darkness either physical or spiritual. It can be also concluded that there will be no barrier between heaven and earth because God Himself is living in this new Creation.

There is a wonderful list of things that will be absent:

1. No sea: Rev 21:1 (No geographical barriers separating the population).
2. No more death: Rev 21:4.
3. No sorrow: Rev 21:4
4. No crying: Rev 21:4
5. No more pain: Rev 21:4
6. No temple: Rev 21:22. (No religious structures).
7. No sun or moon: Rev 21:23
8. No sinners: Rev 21:27
9. No more curse: Rev 22:3
10. No more night: Rev 22:5
11. No devil or demons: Rev 20:10.

The greatest promise is that the city will be illuminated by the direct presence of God: Rev 21:3. In this chapter 21 John sees the Holy Spirit as water flowing from the throne, watering the tree of life, which has twelve fruits, and the leaves which are for the "healthing" of the nations. "Healing" implies that there is sickness, but healthing is what vitamins do to a healthy body.

In the final verses Jesus tells us that He is coming quickly. This does not mean "soon" but "suddenly" and we can be certain it will be on time! The day of grace is drawing fast to its close, and then all things that have been chosen in this world will be made permanent. Those who choose sin and darkness will find that that choice is now fixed for ever. There will be no more repentance, and no more apostasy. The final separation is dawning. Let men make their eternal choice.

There are many questions such as:

Q Will the New Creation be made from the material of the Old?

A Probably not, because Peter tells us that the elements will melt with great heat. The point is: God is the Creator and can produce unlimited materials and also dispose of old ones by the force of His word.

Q Will there be different levels and groups of believers?

A There will be clearly be different levels of rewards, for Jesus spoke of this. Also there is an enigmatic phrase which says that the nations of them that are saved will walk in the light of the Bride, the New Jerusalem. These phrases provoke speculation but provide no answers!

The Purpose for the teaching of the End Times.

There are of course many reasons why this truth is taught.

1. The most obvious one – because the teaching is true and needs to be known!
2. To instill in believers a healthy fear of God: Matt. 10:28
3. To give comfort and hope for the future: 1 Thess. 4:13-18
4. To exhort believers to get ready by personal holiness: 1 Thess. 5:23.
5. To exhort believers to be ready by spiritual watchfulness and personal devotion to Christ: Matt 24:1-13.

Jesus above all else taught that his believers should be constantly alert and ready for His return, both by love for Him and personal holiness. He is the beginning and the end. He was there at the Creation of the human race, and He is the Redeemer of sinful humanity. The Bible is a record of God's plan from the beginning to make each individual a willing partner with God in His Life. This is the greatest story ever told and it is the personal invitation of God to every human being to turn to Him, and use the short life given to us on earth to prepare for the greatest adventure of all, Eternal life with God.

The final warning and the final appeal: Don't change this book, meaning the whole Bible and the Book of Revelation in particular. Let the reader say "come Lord Jesus". This is the cry of the Spirit and the Bride, and all who echo it will be taken up and made part of the New Creation.