

WHEN THE KINGDOM COMES

(REVELATION 20:1-15)

According to the most recent FBI statistics, violent crimes such as murder and sexual assault have increased for the second year in a row – an average of 386 offenses per 100,000 citizens with an additional 2,451 cases of robbery and theft per 100,000. Furthermore, the illegal drug trade, which is the cause of much of this crime, is now estimated at upwards of \$100 billion a year.

How do you feel when you hear news like that? Does it make you want to run away and hide? Move to Australia? Or maybe like me, it makes you pray, “Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Several years ago, *The Cincinnati Post*, came up with an answer for the day. In keeping with the spirit of Christmas, they printed a crime-free front page. The editors decided that for one day, they wouldn’t assault their readers’ senses with crime and violence. So, they put the murders and robberies on the back pages and greeted their readers with a giant headline: MERRY CHRISTMAS! Nice idea, huh? Of course, it was only a temporary fix. Actually, it wasn’t a fix at all. It was just a case of journalistic sweeping the dirt under the carpet, for as much as we’d like to hear only good news, ignoring the bad won’t make it go away.

What will? What’s the final solution to all the gloom and doom we read about today? There is only one lasting solution, and that’s the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. When He comes, He is going to set up a kingdom of righteousness that will never pass away. Peter wrote, “But in keeping with His promise, we look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” Won’t that be wonderful? Imagine picking up your newspaper and finding no mention of crime or violence for 1000 years! And in those few cases where man’s sinful nature breaks out, imagine the relief of seeing perfect justice meted out every time!

That’s the topic of this study – the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ. For 19 chapters, we’ve witnessed man’s inhumanity to man and rebellion against his Creator. But no more! In Revelation chapter 20, we find four banner headlines: “Lucifer Is Locked Up!” “God’s People Are Rewarded!” “Rebellion Is Ended!” “Sinners Are Judged.” These are the four events we’re going to examine in this study. So, get ready for a blessing. For they may be closer than you think.

1. LUCIFER WILL BE INCARCERATED!

Verse 1 begins, “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. He

threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended.”

This is the event believers have been longing for ever since Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Satan will be bound in the bottomless pit! Some Bible students think this already happened at the Cross. Others ask God to bind Satan in their daily prayers. But this verse makes it clear. The binding of Satan won't happen until the beginning of the Kingdom. Dr. James M. Graves explains, “If the devil is bound today, it must be with the terribly long leash.” For as Hal Lindsay argues in his classic book, Satan Is Alive and Well on Planet Earth.

Why is this binding necessary? “To keep him from deceiving the nations.” That's why our world is in trouble today. Satan has convinced mankind that we can get along just fine without the Lordship of Christ. But one day that deception will end. As the hymn says, “We'll share the joys of heaven – a harp, a home, a crown; the tempter will be banished, we'll lay our burden down.” Imagine the peace we will enjoy! Not one evil thought implanted in our minds for a thousand years!

Where will Satan be incarcerated? In the Abyss. The word means that which has “no depth or bottom.” This is not the same as hell. Hell is the lake of fire. This is Hades, a temporary place of torment, where fallen angels and the unsaved dead are kept until the final judgment. Dr. Henry Morris writes:

“Somewhere deep in the center of the earth, a prison cell has been reserved for a special prisoner, a cell in the remotest recesses of the bottomless pit, as far removed from human beings as is possible to be on this planet, with its entrance invincibly sealed so that he cannot direct his demonic hosts. These too will be bound in appropriate compartments of the abyss, as will the spirits of lost men and women, there to await the judgment of the great day. It is doubtful whether such a cavity could ever be detected by scientific measurements made by geophysicists on the earth's surface, but the Bible says it is there.”

But the most interesting fact is how the devil will be bound. We are not told his name, but verse 1 says that one of God's holy angels will do it. All along Satan has tried to frighten us with his power, pretending to be God's opposite. But that is not true. Lucifer is not the opposite of God. He is a fallen angel who will one day be bound in the bottomless pit without Jesus Christ having to lift a finger. He will simply send an angel to put him in his place. It is a reminder that as powerful as the devil is, he and his angels are simply creatures (the opposite of Michael the archangel) who can do no more than what Jesus permits him to do.

2. LOVERS OF JESUS WILL BE REWARDED!

Verse 4 says, “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus . . . They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him 1000 years.”

The first question to ask is: how long will the kingdom last? Surprisingly, this has been a matter of intense debate among Bible-believing Christians. Those who take an Amillennial position (“a” means no Millennium) insist that there will be no literal kingdom on earth – that the “thousand years” is a symbol of the church age and our victories over the devil. At Christ’s return He will judge believers and unbelievers alike, at which point eternity will begin. The problem with this view is that it spiritualizes both the words of this chapter as well as God’s promises to Israel. Six times the phrase “one thousand years” is repeated, stressing that this is a literal one-thousand-year period of time that God is describing.

Postmillennialists, on the other hand, believe the world is getting better and that it is the Church’s duty to expand the Kingdom by preaching the Gospel to every person on earth. Once we achieve this, Christ will return and celebrate the victory with us. Similar to this is the Kingdom Now movement – the belief that though Satan now rules as the god of this world, we believers have the power to bind him and reclaim the earth for Christ. Because we are indwelt with the same Spirit as Jesus, we have all authority in heaven and on the earth and can believe for and speak into existence things that are not, thus bringing the Kingdom to earth.

In my opinion, neither of these views is supported by Scripture. The only view that makes sense is Premillennialism, which teaches that the Old Testament promises to Israel were literal and that one day Jesus will return to earth, set up His throne in Jerusalem, and rule over a Kingdom that will last for one thousand years.

How will this Kingdom begin? John says it will begin with “the first resurrection.” Some Bible students stumble over this phrase. They assume it refers to the first time anyone is resurrected. In other words, the Rapture (or resurrection of the Church) won’t occur until after the Tribulation at the outset of the kingdom. But that’s not what the word “first” suggests. The word actually means “the first type of resurrection,” which includes four phrases: 1 Corinthians 15 says Christ was the “first fruits” of all who are raised; next comes the Rapture of the Church in 1 Thessalonians 4; third will be the resurrection of Tribulation martyrs at the

beginning of the kingdom; and finally, mortal believers who are born during the Kingdom will be transformed at the end of the thousand years.

The Scripture adds that those who take part in the first resurrection are blessed. Why? The reason is because we will not experience the second death. According to the Bible, there are two types of death a person can suffer – physical death in which the soul is separated from the body, and spiritual death in which the soul is separated from God forever. Everyone suffers the first kind of death, due to the sinful nature we inherited from Adam. But those who accept Jesus are spared the second death, which is the lake of fire. In fact, when you realize we deserve this judgment and have been forgiven because of Jesus, it makes you want to fall down and praise God forever! The second reason we are blessed is because we will reign with Christ a thousand years. Instead of fire, we get thrones, and instead of judgment, we become His judges. Whom will we judge? It will include angels, for Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 6 how foolish it is for Christians to take each other to court. For he writes, “Do you not know that we will judge angels?” It will probably also include children who grow up during the Kingdom age.

3. REBELLION WILL BE OVERTHROWN!

One of the most graphic evidences of Satan’s lack of remorse are his actions following his release from prison. He goes forth and immediately inspires another rebellion against God! Who will take part in this uprising? Children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of those who entered the kingdom in mortal bodies. Due to the ideal Kingdom conditions, people will live long lives like the patriarchs Adam, Methuselah, and Noah (Isaiah 65:20) and bear children who will cover the earth’s surface like the sand of the sea. (Revelation 20:8). Outwardly, they will conform to God’s law, but inwardly not all will love Him. Therefore, when Satan is released from the Abyss. He will find mankind riper for temptation than ever before.

John says in verse 7, “When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city He loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

What form will this rebellion take? WAR! War has always been one of Satan’s favorite enterprises. Here he gathers together the descendants of Israel’s

enemies, Gog and Magog, and lays siege to Jerusalem. But the rebellion won't get off the ground. Just as they are about to attack, God sends fire down from heaven and casts Satan into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet are. This makes two facts obvious. First, it corrects the myth that Satan is the king of hell. For what king lets himself be tormented day and night forever? No, Lucifer is not the ruler of hell; he is its primary prisoner, the very one for whom it was created. (Matthew 25:41). Second, it reveals that hell is forever. For even after 1000 years, where are the beast and false prophet? Still suffering in the lake of fire.

Some time ago, I came across a story about a Frenchman named Savain who was captured by Russian troops during Napoleon's invasion in 1812. At the time of his arrest, he was barely in his teens. Finally, after 60 years of confinement, he was placed under house arrest in the town of Saratov. But never was he permitted to go home. After 40 years of house arrest, he died in 1912, making his imprisonment the longest on record – a century and a day! That is a long time. However, when compared to the endless agony of the lake of fire, that was just a moment in time. You see, the most frightening thing about hell, even greater than its pain and loneliness, is the fact that it never ends! It goes on and on forever.

Why does God permit this final great rebellion? To demonstrate the wickedness of man's heart. Almost everyone recognizes that man has a problem. Psychologists say it's a behavioral disorder. Educators claim that it's the result of ignorance. Social reformers say the cause is poverty and racism. But God's Son hung on a cross 2000 years ago to prove that our problem is sin. In the Kingdom, all conditions will be perfect. There will be no hunger, poverty, or racism. Crime and disease will be abolished. And "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:9) But will that be enough to overcome man's problem? No, because his problem is not his environment. It's his evil heart, and the only thing that can cleanse a sinful heart is the blood of Jesus Christ. So let me ask you –

*Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed
in the blood of the Lamb? Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

4. SINNERS WILL BE JUDGED!

Verse 11 says, "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and there was no place found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened."

The scene before us is the Final Judgment when sinners are made to stand before the Great White Throne to answer for their sins. This is not the same as the Judgment Seat of Christ. That is a judgment of believers rewarded for their works. This judgment, on the other hand, involves no rewards and no believers. Only sinners awaiting final condemnation will appear before this throne. However, the Judge in each case is the same – Jesus Christ, to whom God has committed all judgment and at whose presence heaven and earth will flee away.

Why will creation have such a reaction to His glory? Because creation still contains the curse of sin. Remember God’s words to Adam? “Cursed is the earth because of you!” Since then, “the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth.” (Romans 8:22) So, before Christ can usher in a new heaven and a new earth, He must purge this world of sin. He will begin by burning the elements of this present creation with fervent heat. Then He will condemn all sinners who stand before His throne. Death will give up its bodies. Hades will give up its lost souls. Even those buried at sea will be resurrected to stand judgment. (Don’t forget that a whole generation once drowned in the Flood!)

What will be the basis for this judgment? Verse 12 says, “Books were opened . . . and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.” What books will this include? Three books. First, the Word of God. Jesus said, “That very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.” In other words, sinners will be held accountable for the truth they’ve heard. Those who’ve heard the most will be judged most severely. Whereas those who have heard less will be judged more leniently. But all who stand before His throne will be condemned, because no one can be saved by works.

That is the second book, which will be opened – the book of works. Jesus said that God is keeping track of every thought, word and deed committed in this life, and that “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.” (Matthew 12:36). How will God produce this great “Here Was Your Life episode? A DVD and giant screen TV? That won’t be necessary. Dr. Wilbur Penfield, director of the Montréal Neurological Institute, explains:

“Your brain contains a permanent record of your past that is like a single continuous strip of moving film, complete with soundtrack. The film library records your whole waking life from childhood on. You can live again those scenes from your past, one at a time, when a surgeon applies a gentle electrical current to a certain point on the temporal cortex of your brain. As you relive the scenes from your past, you feel exactly the same emotions you did during the original experience.”

Perhaps God will expose our sins in a similar way. But, whatever the method, verse 15 is clear. No one will escape this judgment, except those whose names are written in the third book, "The Book of Life." Who will this include? Those who have turned to Christ as Savior. In an earlier study, John wrote, "He who overcomes . . . I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." (Revelation 3:5) How does one become such an overcomer? John writes in 1 John 5:5, "Who is the one who overcomes, but He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

But someone may wonder, if every sinner who stands before the Great White Throne is condemned, why bother judging their works? Because there are degrees of judgment in hell, just as there are degrees of reward in heaven. Jesus said, "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him, they will ask the more." (Luke 12:47-48)

So, take a final self-check before we finish this study. Ask yourself: If my life were to end today, would God welcome me into His kingdom? If so, on what basis? The only acceptable answer is: I'm trusting Jesus to save me. In fact, Jesus promised if we submit to His Lordship, we won't have to face this final judgment. "Verily, verily I say unto you, he who hears My voice and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." (John 5:24) So, if you have not bowed your heart to Jesus, do so now! Then make it real by telling someone about it. After all, can you think of anything more critical in this life, than deciding where you will spend eternity?

Matthew Henry, the famous Bible teacher, was once attacked and robbed. Afterwards he made this comment: "Let me be thankful first, because although they took my money, they did not take my life; second, because although they took my all, it was not much; and third, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

Isn't that a terrific response to injustice? I share that as an example of the attitude we should have as we endure the wickedness of this world and await the glory of the world to come. You and I are surrounded by sin and violence. Liars prosper. Criminals are pampered. The proud are lifted up. But rather than focusing on this present evil, what you and I must learn to do is content ourselves with the great truths revealed in this study. First, we need to give thanks that whatever we suffer in this life is short-lived compared to the eternal glory we are about to enjoy. Second, we need to show mercy toward those who are sinning, remembering what they're about to suffer unless we win them to Christ. And finally, we need to make

sure of our own salvation and rewards – that we are not only headed for God’s Kingdom, but that we will have a place of honor reserved for us when we arrive.

C. S. Lewis believed passionately in the return of Jesus Christ. However, he felt it necessary to issue this warning to those of us who want Him to hurry. He asked, “Why did God land in this enemy-occupied world in disguise and start a sort of secret society to undermine the devil? Why is He not landing in force, invading it? Is it that He is not strong enough? Well, Christians think He is going to land in force; we do not know when. But we can guess why He is delaying. He wants to give us the chance of joining His side freely. I do not suppose you and I would have thought much of a Frenchman who waited till the Allies were marching into Germany and then announced he was on our side.”

“God will invade. But I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere directly in our world quite realize what it will be like when He does. When that happens, it is the end of the world. When the author walks on to the stage the play is over. God is going to invade, all right: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else—something it never entered your head to conceive—comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; a sight so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing; it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realized it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it.”

I agree with Lewis. Jesus Christ is preparing to return to our world very soon, crushing rebellion, judging His enemies, and setting up a Kingdom of righteousness that will last forever. But it is only those of us who choose to love and serve Him now who will be happy then. Will that include you?