

God's Great Tomorrow, part 5
Clairemont SDA Church
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Let's remind ourselves of God's simple, sensible and Scriptural plan for the redemption of this world. Jesus comes back in the sky as He promised. He raises the righteous dead and changes the living saints to immortality and we rise together to meet Him in the air. Those who have rejected His gift of life are consumed by the brightness of His glory and Satan and his angels are left alone on this planet, clothed with darkness for 1,000 years.

During the millennium the saints are in heaven, affirming the righteous judgments of God. Following the 1,000 years, God, His city and His saints come down from heaven to this earth. The wicked are raised for final judgment. They attempt to attack the New Jerusalem, but fire from God consumes and destroys them forever. The fire cleanses the earth and its atmosphere, and then God re-creates this planet to the perfect condition that existed before sin.

Today we're taking a look at the part of the plan that involves the 1,000 years that follow Jesus' coming. We're going to study the "what, where and why" of the Millennium. The word "Millennium" doesn't actually appear in the Bible, but since the period of the 1,000 years is mentioned frequently in Revelation 20, and because "Millennium" simply means 1,000 years, it's not wrong to use that term. The 20th chapter of Revelation will be the main source of our study today because it uses the phrase "1,000 years" 6 times in the first 7 verses of that chapter.

Let's read from God's word what it says about this important topic. Even though some of the terms are presented in "prophetic code," by comparing with other Scriptures we can understand what the Bible means. "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were

finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.”
Revelation 20:1-3

Here we are given much information about the 1,000 years. The word “Then” that opens the first verse is significant, in that it sets a time marker on when the period begins. It begins when Christ comes back. That marker is confirmed by another technique, which we’ll discover in verses 5 and 6. “*Then* I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit” who lays hold on the devil and chains him.

“Then.” What is that that has been described as happening immediately before this? It’s the second coming of Jesus, pictured dramatically in chapter 19:11 and onward through the rest of the chapter. Jesus is portrayed as a victorious military general in this setting. In chapter 14, He appears as the One Who harvests the earth with sickle in hand, the grain representing the righteous, the grapes representing the wicked. Elsewhere in Scripture He’s presented as the heavenly Groom, coming to receive His bride, the Church.

When Jesus comes in chapter 19, those who have rejected Him and spurned the gift of life are destroyed. At that time the “beast” (the papacy) and the “false prophet” (fallen Protestantism) together with the “kings of the earth,” those who have joined together in the last great apostasy, are killed. Many, in keeping with the stories of the Scripture, self-destruct. They rise up against the false teachers who have peddled lies. There is bloodshed everywhere. That’s what the Bible means when it says, “Then the *rest* (of the wicked) were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse.” Revelation 19:21. The KJV says, “The remnant were slain.” That’s a “remnant” you don’t want to be a part of.

This is telling us clearly that when Jesus comes, you are either in the group swept up to the glorious cloud to live forever with Him, or your life comes to an end. There’s no middle ground, no “in-between.” Revelation 19 and 20 make it very clear that there is no human life left on this planet following the return of Jesus. That’s why it’s so important to be ready! Satan has conjured up the concept the Jesus comes and institutes a 1,000 period of peace on this planet and another chance to receive salvation is given. Not true! Fatal deception! His coming is “climactic,” that is, it is a finalization, a coming to a point of completion. Human life will not continue on this planet after He comes, at least until the 1,000 years are over.

We're told that the "dragon," that is Satan or the Devil, is chained in the "bottomless pit" for this period of time. Let's give some thought to these two ideas. What is the "bottomless pit," and what does it mean when it says that the devil is "bound"? Here's where comparing "Scripture with Scripture" opens the door of understanding. The word translated "bottomless pit" in verses 1 and 3 is the word *abussos*, which comes into our language as the word "abyss." It describes a vast, chaotic or unimproved condition. It is the very same word that is found in Genesis 1:2 (in the LXX) where it says that in the beginning the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the "deep." The word "deep" in the Greek Old Testament is *abussos*, the same as in Revelation 20:1, 3.

So, in some similar way the earth after Jesus comes back will resemble the earth before He exercised His creative touch upon it. If we understand what takes place at Christ's coming, this makes perfect sense. The Bible makes it clear that great devastation will occur, just before and at the coming of Jesus. Combined with the effects of the 7 last plagues there will be great earthquakes and mighty hailstones which will wreak destruction. We're told that this great earthquake will cause every mountain and island to be moved from their places. Revelation 16:20. That's a great earthquake! That would make all the other catastrophic 9.0 ones we've seen seem small in comparison.

That earthquake and the hailstones (roughly 75 pounds in weight) that fall will demolish all of the monuments of man's achievements. All the skyscrapers and glorious hotels will collapse. It's sad to think of what will happen at that time. When I was in Dubai we took a tour of the city and witnessed all the spectacular buildings going up. They told us that the national bird of their country was the "building crane," and that about 20-25% of all the 125,000 or so building cranes in the world were in use there. I thought of how that great, growing city will look on the day of Jesus' return. It will be laid low in the dust, along with all of the tokens of man's pride.

The Old Testament confirms this picture of destruction when Jesus comes. Jeremiah reports, "I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void. And the heavens, they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of the LORD, by His fierce anger." Jeremiah 4:23—26. Notice that Jeremiah also uses the very same words to describe the condition of the earth

after Christ's coming as Genesis 1 uses to describe it before God improved the earth. It was "without form and void." He specifically mentions that there is absence of human life: "there was no man," that the "cities were broken down" and that this was all tied to the return of Christ. It happened "at the presence of the LORD."

Isaiah adds his voice to the testimony as well. "Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants. The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut (a make-shift bamboo shack in a hurricane). It shall come to pass in that day that the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on the earth the kings of the earth. They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished." Isaiah 24:1, 19-22. File the thought of that last phrase in your mind. We'll come back to it later.

There's a message in this process. The Lord wants to give the earth a "rest." It's His way of giving this planet a much needed "sabbatical." Remember that when Judah went into captivity for 70 years, the Lord described it as being an accumulation of all the years of sabbatical rest that Judah withheld from the land. II Chronicles 36:20, 21.

So this earth is a state of chaotic rubble after Christ comes back. What's the message in that? It's that Satan had boasted that he had a better plan, a better "operating system." But what do we see? After 6,000 years of his reign, it's not better. In fact, it's far worse! Satan and his angels will be left on this planet which will be in a condition similar to what it was before God improved on it, including a mantle of darkness. Remember that Genesis 1 says that "darkness" was upon the face of the deep, and that the first thing that God did was to say, "Let there be light." Darkness will again envelope this planet (think about that!) during the 1,000 years. What did Jeremiah say? "I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form and void; and the heavens, they had no light." That absence of light is not only literal; it's meant to demonstrate that Satan's way has "no light" in it whatsoever.

Satan is "chained" to this earth. What is the significance of that? Remember that Satan was originally Lucifer, a beautiful and gifted angel. After his expulsion from heaven, he was still allowed access to heaven's courts on certain occasions when meetings took place, as reported in the book of Job. However, after Jesus died on the cross and

sealed his doom, Satan no longer was permitted that access to heaven. That's why Revelation 12 states that after Jesus' victory on the cross, "Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.'" Revelation 12:10. Looking forward to this achievement Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Luke 10:18.

We can think of Satan's demotion in 3 phases. Sometime before the story of Adam and Eve he rebelled and was "cast out" of heaven, but allowed limited access as we see in the book of Job. That was "phase 1." But after the cross, that access into the courts of heaven during special meetings was revoked. That was phase 2. That's the phase under which Satan operates now. He can't get into heaven, but he is allowed to roam the universe. Of course, God's loyal creatures won't listen to him, but he still has the liberty to travel throughout space.

However when Jesus comes back that liberty will be curtailed. He will in a very literal way be "chained" to this earth. That will be "phase 3," which will define his confinement during the 1,000 years. Sister White adds this insightful comment.

His "chains" are also those of circumstance. He can't deceive anyone during this time. Notice again how the Bible equates his being "chained" to his inability to deceive. This is most important to see. "He (the angel) laid hold of the dragon and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, *so that* (notice the connection between the two thoughts) he should *deceive the nations no more* till the thousand were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while." He is bound by the "chains of circumstance," prohibiting him from practicing deception.

Notice that Satan gets a "seal." There is a "seal" that is applied to God's saints prior to their translation. It represents the fixation of their characters and destinies. In a sense the "seal" that is placed on Satan is similar. It demonstrates the fixation of his character and destiny. He spends that 1,000 years with his angels pondering the wisdom and outcome of their apostasy. At some point after the 1,000 years, the Bible says that "every knee" will bow and confess that Jesus is Lord. The phrase "every knee" includes Satan, who will acknowledge the rightful rulership of Jesus, though he will be unable to repent

toward salvation. Part of the purpose of the 1,000 years is for Satan to slowly digest the effects of his rebellion.

During the Millennium Christ is with His saints in heaven. What are they doing? "And I saw thrones and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead (the wicked) did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Revelation 20:4-6.

When it says, "they lived and reigned with Christ," the verb "lived" can be translated "came to life" and is so rendered in a number of translations. This ties the beginning of the 1,000 years to the "first resurrection," which we know takes place at the second coming of Christ. That's an easy marker to spot, and it agrees with how Revelation 19 ends and chapter 20 begins. When Jesus comes back and the wicked are destroyed, the righteous dead are raised and taken to heaven, and the 1,000 years commences. We'll see later that the "second resurrection," the resurrection of the lost, closes the Millennium, making it easy to see that the two resurrections are the boundaries for this period of 1,000 years. The "first resurrection" begins it; the "second resurrection" closes it. If you have those two markers in mind, you won't be confused. And of course, we know that the first resurrection takes place when Jesus comes back in glory. So the Millennium begins when Christ returns to this earth and takes the saints to heaven. That's not hard to grasp.

What are the saints doing in heaven? It says "I saw thrones and they sat on them and judgment was committed to them." Notice the similarity between this description and the one given in Daniel 7 when we're told about "thrones" being set up when the "court is seated and the books are opened." The difference is that that judgment scene takes place *before* Jesus comes back, when the subjects of His kingdom are being made up. This judgment takes place *after* Christ returns. I'm glad for that, because it means that we aren't asked to decide who is saved or lost. That's entirely in God's hands, with the affirmation of the heavenly angels.

This judgment in Revelation 20 takes place after Christ returns. By that time it is clear who the saved are and who the lost are. You're either with Jesus in heaven or you're dead on this earth. So why would

it describe a judgment scene? Why does it say that "judgment was committed to them"? A careful look at the word translated "judgment" in this verse (*krima*) reveals that it has the nuance of "result of judgment," rather "process of judgment" (*krisis*) as used elsewhere in Scripture. The saints are allowed to look at the evidence accumulated, not to determine who is going to be saved or lost; that's already been decided. But they have the opportunity to review the evidence to affirm the righteous judgments of God as well as to totally satisfy any questions that might exist as to why someone isn't there that seemed to be a Christian. God will open the record books so that humans will be able to see what He already knows, which is the condition of the heart. While the outside might have looked pretty good, God will reveal that the heart was impure and corrupt, and it would have been a serious mistake to allow that person admittance into the holiness of heaven. They wouldn't be happy living in a place without sin anyway. Heaven would be torture to the unconverted heart.

In addition to that, or perhaps we should say along with that, there's another purpose in this period being 1,000 years. God is providing this "time of transition" (another way of looking at the purpose of the Millennium) for the saints to allow them to adjust to the realities of His dealing with the sin problem. It is a stark and foreboding reality. After the 1,000 years, as we'll study next time, the wicked will be destroyed. That will be a traumatic event. It will be God's "strange act." Isaiah 28:21, KJV. We can think about it now; we can try to visualize what that will be like. But all of our imaginations won't measure up to what it will really be like on that day. No matter how convinced we might think we are today about God's justice, it's not going to be easy to witness the destruction of the wicked. God Himself will be in tears. The Son of David will weep as did King David when his rebellious and murderous son Absalom died. See II Samuel 18 and 19. When it says, after the 1,000 years and the destruction of sinners, that God "wipes away every tear from their eyes," just remember that He's also wiping away the tears from His own eyes.

Allow me to share this thought with you that makes sense to my way of thinking. We know that the day came in heaven when all the angels had to make a choice, either to side with Lucifer in rebellion or remain loyal to God. Those angels who chose to stay with God made their decision and for the next 4,000 years witnessed the effects of sin, beginning with the murder of Abel by Cain on down the line. They saw the violence and corruption that led to the Flood. They witnessed the cruelty of Manasseh who saturated the streets of Jerusalem with innocent blood. They saw all of this, and much more. Yet, and this is a

thought that might startle your thinking, we're told that it was not until the Son of God was placed on the cross that the "last tie of sympathy" was broken between them and Lucifer. (See Ellen G. White, "Signs of the Times," September 23, 1889) Amazing!

Yes, they had made their decision and they stayed true to God. Yet, there was some trace, some vestige of sympathy that remained *until* the time when Jesus was crucified. These were angels, gifted in intelligence and reasoning powers. But here's the point. God did not force their minds, but allowed them to see for themselves the drama as it unfolded. The angels "saw for themselves." We have a word in our language that is built from that idea. You may be surprised to know what it is, but I think it will make sense to you if you think about it. A person passes away and a question arises as to the cause of death. So a physician conducts an examination to try to determine the reason. What's that process called? It's an "autopsy," isn't it. Look at the two parts of that word. "Auto" is "self," as in "*automobile*" (a self-propelled vehicle), an "*autobiography*" (a life-story of ones self) and many other words. The last part comes from the same root as does "optic," and "optician," and many other words.

An "autopsy" is when you "see for yourself," in this case the cause of death. God right now, while the investigative judgment is going on in heaven, is allowing the angels to "see for themselves" the cause of "death," in the hearts of those who refuse salvation. There's a heavenly "autopsy" going on right now as angels become satisfied as to God's righteous judgment in excluding those who have turned down the Gift of salvation, and in saving those who have received Christ.

In a similar way, the saints will have made their decision to follow Christ. But God is going to patiently allow us 1,000 years, as we become more acquainted with the facts, as "judgment is committed" to us and we see the malignity of sin, as we realize that there is no other way to solve the sin problem, so that when the day of doom comes for Satan and his followers and life comes to an end for them, there will be no tinge, no whisper of sympathy toward his cause. It will be seen as an act of justice, yes, an act of mercy that removes forever the author of sin and his disciples. Part of our experience will be participating in that heavenly "autopsy" as we are allowed to examine the corpse of rebellion and apostasy. Wonderful love of a God who wants us to know thoroughly the righteousness of His kingdom, the transparency of His government!

What a glorious future awaits for those who choose God's way, and we know that the next big event in God's plan is not very far off! He desires to share with us an eternity of unbroken joy and peace. Praise God for providing the means for lost sinners like you and me to share in His great and glorious tomorrow.