

THE MILLENNIAL ISSUE

Day 4

June 2008

So, we have made our journey through the nation of Israel, to the book of Daniel, and finally to the rapture of the saints. Now I want us to study briefly the Second Advent and the question of the Millennium. Believe it or not there are a number of views on whether or not this is a literal period of time, but I won't be going into that here. First let's take a very brief look at the Second Advent, which leads us into the Millennial period.

Zechariah 14:1,2 'Behold the day of the Lord is coming and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem: the city shall be taken, the houses plundered and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.'

This is the battle of Armageddon and it is into this situation that Jesus returns – catches the antichrist right at it! To see what occurs just before He comes let's look at Amos 8:9 *“And it shall come to pass **in that day,**” says the Lord God “that I will make the sun go down at noon and I will darken the earth in broad daylight”.*

So, at the time of the Second Advent, before Jesus comes again, there will be a period of darkness, and if you read the scriptures associated with His Second Advent, you will always find a period of darkness appears at the same time. Just quickly to see this, turn to Matthew 24:26-29 –

‘Therefore, if they say to you ‘Look He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken’.

So this darkness foreshadows the Second Advent. Now let's move on to the Millennium.

The Millennium gets its name from the Latin word for one thousand, and the Millennium is a period of one thousand years when Jesus will reign on the renewed earth for everyone to see.

When Jesus returns to the earth, it is in a bad way. The effects of the fall, warfare and God's judgements will have made it almost unrecognisable from how it is today. As the Millennium is going to be the best period of time in the earth's history, with the exception of the Garden of Eden, Jesus will have quite a lot to do to get it up to the mark! Before we see exactly what He will do, let's remind ourselves what He does when He first returns to earth.

First of all He deals with Satan, the Antichrist and the false prophet. Though we have not studied these

characters in this study of Revelation, in the next one we will, as we will also look at the monsters of Daniel, the woman clothed with the Sun and various other very interesting items. So for the moment, the glorified Saviour and Lord deals with His adversaries.

Revelation 19:19-21 'And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.'

This deals with the antichrist and the false prophet and they go straight into the lake of fire. That is their judgement. No Great White Throne for them. Their fate is sealed.

Revelation 20:1-3 '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.'

Satan does not suffer the same fate yet. He will, but not just yet.

So this is what happens to Satan after the Second Advent of Jesus Christ – incidentally we haven't looked at any of the battles in Revelation yet, we will do so in the next series, the battle which leads up to the Second Advent is the battle of Armageddon and the one at the end of the Tribulation is the Gog and Magog rebellion. Just in case you were wondering which is which and where they fit in! For the purposes of this study we are looking at two things, the Majesty and Supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ and the nation of Israel. In the next study we will be looking at the battles, the four monsters of Daniel etc.

The fact that there is a seal on this bottomless pit is an indication of ownership or security and sometimes, in the ancient world, it meant both. So we have Satan sealed, unable to do anything for 1,000 years. That tells us that for 1,000 years he will not be able to influence mankind at all. Jesus will be in Jerusalem and all will be able to see Him. This makes it even more amazing that at the end of this time, so many people will follow Satan who will be released again for a short time to test the hearts of man. It takes the ground away from those who would say 'If I could see Jesus I would believe' – even when they can see Him, they do not believe. Frightening.

The second thing which happens is that Jesus removes all the **unbelievers** from the earth.

When Jesus returns He sits in judgement on all the people who are alive, no matter where they live on the earth. He will judge them all. Believers and unbelievers as we know are separated, and the unbelievers are removed.

Jesus starts his judgement with the Jews.

Ezekiel 20:33-38 "As surely as I live," says the Lord God, "surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will judge you face to face, just as I judged My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I judge My case with you," says the Lord God. "I will make you pass under the rod and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they sojourn, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord"

That is the removal of the unbelieving Jews from the earth. Other scriptures give us the same account. Jesus said the same in Matthew when He said he will baptize the Jews with fire. So the believers are left on the earth, but the unbelievers are removed. The Gentiles are judged, and they are separated. Remember please, this has nothing to do with us, these are the people left at the end of the Great Tribulation, we arrived with Jesus, following Him on white horses and white linen, fresh and clean, ready to reign and rule with Him.

Matthew 25: 31-46 'When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.'

All this happens at the beginning of the Millennium. So on the earth at the beginning of the Millennium there are only **believers**, both Jew and Gentile. That is what we found with the flood, the believers were left on the earth, but the unbelievers were removed. So at the beginning of the Millennium only believers are left on the earth and they will repopulate the earth and there is a massive population explosion. Of course, those who are born during this time will have to make their own decision for Christ as we will see.

The third thing Jesus does is He deals with death, but not completely. Death's power is limited. What do I mean by that? 1 Corinthians 15:26 *'The last enemy that will be destroyed is death'*. Every person who has or will live on the earth will have suffered physical death with the exception of Enoch and Elijah, and the believers who are alive during the Millennium and those who are alive at the rapture of the church.

With those exceptions everyone else is under death's power and death will only be destroyed when there is no one left in its power. So how does Jesus deal with death during the millennium? He does it in stages – four very clever stages –

1. The first stage was when Jesus rose from the dead. He came as a man, He died as a man and for three days He was in the realm of death. On the third day Jesus rose with a glorious resurrection body and will never suffer death again. So Jesus the Head of the Body, the church, and has been

released from the power of death. That is the first stage in death's defeat.

2. The second stage is when the church is Raptured. Every person who has believed on the Lord Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost is going to be released from the power of death and the church which is the Body of Christ will be removed from that realm. So the second stage in the defeat of death is the removal from its realm of the Body of Christ, the church.
3. The third stage affects the beginning of the Millennium. Revelation 20:4 the believers in the Tribulation period are those in verse 4, those who have been martyred during the tribulation period are released from death's grip and will reign with Jesus in the Millennium.

What Revelation does not tell but other parts of the Bible do is that all Old Testament believers rise as well and we can see that in Job 19: 25-27

'For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.'

That is the Second Advent of Jesus Christ – Job here is saying he will receive a resurrection body. The third stage in death's defeat is the raising of the Tribulation martyrs and the Old Testament believers.

Isaiah 26:19 *'Your dead shall live, together with my dead body, they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs and the earth shall cast out the dead'.*

So now we have Jesus, the church, the tribulation martyrs and the Old Testament believers, all risen and they are all released from the grip of death. The only people held by death are the unbelievers. The fourth and last stage in death's defeat comes at the end of the Millennium.

4. The unbelievers are raised at the end of the Millennium and at the very end death is empty and holds no-one and therefore the last enemy to be destroyed – is death. It isn't until death and Hades is emptied of all that are held there, all the unbelievers down the ages, and they stand before the Great White Throne and are judged and thrown into the lake of fire that, Death and Hades join Satan, the beast and the false prophet. This all takes place at the end of the Millennial period.

The fourth thing that Jesus does on His return at the Second Advent is to ease the curse on the earth. When Adam fell all creation suffered the fall as well because things changed, the climate changed, the thorns started to grow animals were no longer vegetarian – they liked the odd piece of meat – like man chop!

Romans 8:20-22 *'For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay (or corruption) into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with*

birth pangs together until now.'

This tells us creation is in bondage as well, but when Jesus returns to the earth He releases the earth from some of the effects of the fall. To see that we need to look at Isaiah 35:1,2 *'The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God.'* This will happen in the Millennium. Under the Sahara desert is the biggest supply of fresh water anywhere in the world. At the beginning of the Millennium this water will be released.

It is a matter of interest that since Israel was back in her land the summer and the autumn rains have returned and have made it a country rich in verdure and fruit and vegetable production – until the Jews returned it was a dry waste. God is blessing His people with fruitfulness as an indication of what is to come. When we buy fruit and vegetables that originate in Israel, they are delicious.

Amos 9:13-15 *"Behold the days are coming", says the Lord, "when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall built the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them," says the Lord your God.'* Here God is speaking about the restoration of Israel at the beginning of the Millennium. Things change with nature and the animals as well.

Isaiah 11:6-9 *'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

The return of the Lord Jesus Christ will change things in the animal kingdom all over the earth. Every person will be blessed and provided for as well, the life span of people is going to be increased again like it was before the flood -

Genesis 5:25-32 *'Methuselah lived 187 years, and begot Lamech. After he begot Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years, and begot sons and daughters. So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died. Lamech lived 182 years and he begot a son. And he called his name Noah saying, 'This one will comfort us **concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed.**' After he begot Noah, Lamech lived 595 years and begot sons and daughters. So all the days of Lamech were 777 years; and he died. And Noah was 500 years old and Noah begot Shem, Ham and Japheth.'*

It is going to be that way again, the lifespan is going to be increased. But notice too that even at this time,

within a few years of the fall, the curse is biting and it is by the sweat of his brow that man brings forth food from the earth. Methuselah (his name means 'when I die it will come to pass' – and when he died the flood came) says Noah will '*comfort them concerning the work and toil of their hands because of the ground which the Lord has cursed.*' Man did not sweat before the fall, everything was effortless. And he looks forward to Noah being a help to him and his wife.

Isaiah 65:20-25 'No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die 100 years old, but the sinner being 100 years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and that while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain', says the Lord.'

Here we see the restoration of Israel, spoken of so much in the Old Testament. Isaiah, incidentally, is the book which gives us most of the details on the Millennium. So the fourth thing is that the curse on the earth is eased, including death.

The fifth thing that will happen is that Jerusalem and the land of Israel are going to be changed:

Zechariah 14:8 'And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea (the Dead Sea) and half of them toward the western sea (the Mediterranean Sea); both summer and winter it shall occur.

So fresh water, half of it, will run from Jerusalem into the Dead Sea and the other half will run into the Mediterranean Sea. This will result in a fresh water canal which will connect the Mediterranean with the Dead Sea. So this area will change and water will flow all the time.

Zechariah 14:10 'All the land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin's Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananeel to the king's winepresses.'

Arabah is a plain, and every mountain and hill from Geba to Rimmon will be removed and the land of Israel becomes one plain with the exception of Jerusalem which will stand on a hill which will be higher than it is today. So wherever you live in Israel you will be able to see Jerusalem. So there are the physical geographical changes in the land of Israel in the Millennium.

Isaiah 2:2-4 headed up in my bible as 'The Day of the Lord' and we all know what that is by now. '*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob He*

will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.’

We can see the changes that will occur in the land of Israel and at this point Jesus will be reigning in Jerusalem over the earth.

So to recap – the five things Jesus does when He first comes back to the earth are:

1. He removes Satan and locks him up for 1,000 years
2. He removes the unbelievers
3. He loosens death’s grip
4. He deals with the effects of the fall as far as the animals, nature and the life span of man is concerned – it is put back to what it was like before the fall.
5. The landscape of Israel and Jerusalem is changed.

With that behind us, I want to look at what will happen to the people living on the earth.

At the beginning of the millennium only believers are on the earth, but as they live on extended lives, they have children and these children grow and they start having children of their own and the earth gets repopulated. All these offspring will have to make their own decision regarding Who Jesus is. At the end of the 1,000 years there will be a vast number of people living on the earth but not all of them are believers, in fact, relatively speaking, quite few will believe.

I can feel that what you are interested in is what **we** will be doing during this time! To see this we will have to return to the book of Revelation and specifically Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Here we find the letters to seven specific churches written around 96 AD by John at the Lord’s command. We would say that Jesus was giving them an appraisal, to use our modern term. Measuring their performance.

We looked at them yesterday when we examined whether the church would go through the Tribulation time or not. But as always there are several ways of looking at the same thing in the bible, this is another. Many people do not understand these letters, they do not know what had happened to the church since Jesus established it by the time these letters were written the wheat and the tares were growing together. The church was, as it is today, a very mixed group of people. There were born again believers who were seeking to do things God’s way, but there were also people who were religious, those who were not born again. So you have two groups of people in these churches and these letters are written to both groups. In His last letter to the church at Laodicea Jesus preaches the gospel.

Revelation 3:20 *‘Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will*

come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me'

This letter is written to the church, not to the unbelieving people in the world at large. Here is a gospel appeal to the religious people who are not born again in the church.

Revelation 3:21,22 *'To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Those who overcome will sit on the throne with Jesus in judgement; God the Father had authority in the Old Testament to judge - John 5: 26,27 *'As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgement also, because He is the Son of Man.'*

This shows us God the Father handed over judgement of mankind to Jesus. So Jesus has the authority of His Father to judge. And Revelation 3:21 shows us that we are also going to have some rulership, and we will reign with Jesus when He reigns. When the rapture of the church occurs we go to be with Jesus and when He reigns, we reign. What about the part that talks about overcomers?

You will always find people who say you only reign if you overcome and we don't know who overcomes – yes we do actually, because the Bible tells us in 1 John 5:4,5 *'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.'* This defines an overcomer, so if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you automatically become an overcomer and you will reign with Jesus for all eternity.

Let me just add that this does not set aside the fact that throughout your Christian walk God will give you circumstances to live through in order that you may learn to overcome and rule in this life. The whole of our time here is training for that reigning with Christ. This is why it is so important that we understand the whole gospel and not just a part. That our lives are His, He has a plan for them, and we need to get into step with that plan in order that we may come into everything He has ordained for us. I don't know about you, but I want to treat this life as boot camp so that when I go home, I shall be equipped to reign with Him I don't want to have to go through more training when I get there!

An interesting scripture to back up this point is found in 2 Timothy 2:3,4: 11,12 *'You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.'* And

'this is a faithful saying: for if we died with Him we shall also live with Him, if we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He will also deny us.'

Many people have a real hard time with this verse, saying that we can lose our salvation – this is not what this is saying. It is saying if we are faithless, He is still faithful, because He cannot deny Himself. This verse is not talking about salvation, but about denying us rewards.

We will have a look in a moment at the rewards issue, but a good example is your children – you say – 'If

you are good, you can have an ice cream, if you are not, you will not get one.’ What we are saying to them is that if they behave, they will be rewarded. So this verse is talking about our works, **not our relationship**. He has prepared works for us to do – we need to find out what they are and do them with all that is within us. Scripture for that is found in Ephesians 2:10 *‘For we are His workmanship (poema) created in Jesus Christ for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them’*.

So these verses in Timothy are talking about **loss of reward** as far as believers are concerned. Some believers will lose rewards, but not salvation. They lose their reward because they denied Jesus what He wanted from their lives.

Verse 13 is there in case you think verse 12 is talking about salvation. *‘If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.’* We are Jesus’ reward and He has faithfully fulfilled what God His Father wanted Him to do, and as such Jesus will get His reward. We are His inheritance. You and I are that reward, so we will reign with Him. So when things are hard, and you are suffering because of your faith in Jesus, be encouraged because you will also reign with Him.

Luke 22:29,30 *‘And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table, and sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.’*

In the Millennium the disciples will be reigning over the nation of Israel. We, the church, will be reigning but we aren’t told the location. Revelation 20:6 *‘...and they shall reign with Him 1,000 years.’*

Let’s now have a quick look at the people who live on the earth in their ordinary bodies, remember we will have our resurrection bodies, to see how they will be governed and what laws they will live by. Does it surprise you that there will still be ‘laws’ by which people will live? Jesus said *‘heaven and earth will pass away but My word will not pass away’*.

To see the laws they will have to abide by, let’s go to the book of Micah 4:1-3 -

‘Now it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come up and say “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, He will teach us His ways and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’.

You may have noticed that this scripture is almost identical to that in Isaiah 2: 2-4! Verse 3 shows us Jesus will judge between all the nations of the earth. Notice too arguments and disputes will still be around, even with Satan locked up. Sin does not come from the devil but from the human heart. People sin because they are fallen, and they have got an old sin nature. The point being that the devil is locked up but the old sin nature isn’t! Even in the golden age of the Millennium.

What laws are there going to be during this time? It is a type of society that we do not have on the earth

today. It will be a theocracy – God will rule directly on the earth during the Millennium. So what laws are there in a theocracy?

We can see some of them because we have had a theocracy on the earth before – it was with the nation of Israel. If you read the book of Deuteronomy you will see the laws God gives for the nation and you will remember Israel did not like God ruling them and they asked for a human king and got King Saul. They went down hill from there. So again, in the Millennium, a theocracy is established, along with God's laws.

We can find some of these laws and systems in Zechariah 14:16 –

'And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.' Interesting thing here, the Feast of Tabernacles a Jewish feast, is reinstated at this time. Can you see how Israel is exactly central to everything God does? This is why, I believe, He has had me concentrate on the whole issue of the Jewish nation in this study, that we might see and have reinforced that from beginning to end the Bible is about one nation – the Jews and His dealings with them. We are of all people most blessed to be grafted in, believe me.

So, here we have the reinstatement of the Feast of Tabernacles and people will go up to Jerusalem, where Jesus is reigning, year after year to worship. This feast was the one which looked forward to the day when God came and tabernacled, with mankind and this is what happens during the Millennium. This going up year by year is what the Americans would call an 'oath of loyalty' because God is living with man during this period and that is why the Feast is kept during this time.

Zechariah 14:17,18 *'And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain, they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.'*

Egypt will survive the Tribulation, there will be Egyptian believers, but why does Egypt get the plague if they will not go up to Jerusalem to worship? Egypt is one of those nations that does not need rainfall, it gets its water from the Nile. The Nile starts high up in the Ethiopian mountains. As long as the nations along the Nile have been up to worship Jesus, rain will fall and the Nile will flow, so water for Egypt will be all right. So if Egypt does not go and worship the Lord, they will get the plague. There are, of course, other nations who are in the same position as Egypt, that is, they get their water from a river source which starts outside their country, they also will be subject to the plague if they do not go up to worship as they have been told.

There was a crime in the Old Testament that was worse than anything else as far as God was concerned, and that was idolatry. You will remember how often Israel broke God's heart by chasing after other 'gods' that were not God. In the Millennium, this will again be a crime which attracts the death penalty. In the Millennium, there will be certain crimes that do attract the death penalty, not every crime, but some, and

idolatry is one. The reason for this is that idolatry is treason in a Theocracy where God is King.

In Britain today, treason is no longer a capital offence, but would attract life imprisonment since the law was changed in 1998. That is why in the Old Testament you read that idolaters were put to death. That will happen again during the Millennium.

Zechariah 13:2-6 "It shall be in that day", says the Lord of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirits to depart from the land. It shall come to pass that if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, 'You shall not live because you have spoken lies in the name of the Lord.' And his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies. And it shall be in that day that every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; they will not wear a robe of coarse hair to deceive. But he will say, I am no prophet, I am a farmer; for a man taught me to keep cattle from my youth'. And someone will say to him "What are those wounds in your hands?" then he will answer, 'those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'"

Those are the laws of a Theocracy.

Micah 4:3 'He shall judge between many peoples and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more'.

Worldwide peace comes only when Jesus returns to the earth and not before. There will not be peace on earth before the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.

Micah 4:4,5 'But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken. ⁵For all people walk each in the name of his god but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.'

Notice verse 5 – even with peace, prosperity, a good environment and the devil locked up, there are still those around who do not want to believe, and it is because of that that at the **end** of the Millennium something startling happens.

Revelation 20:7,8 'Now when the 1,000 years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, (which simply means a ruler and his people) to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.'
That is a lot of people!

These people had Jesus living on the earth but so soon as Satan is released, they rush to join him. Why is he let out? Simply, to test the hearts of men, just as in the Garden of Eden. Man does not believe because he does not want to believe.

God doesn't waste a lot of time telling us what finally happens to our adversary. In Revelation 20:9,10 we see his final end -

*'They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. **And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.** And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.'*

Revelation 20:6 *'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.'*

The first resurrection refers to all believers. Most of us will die, although not all, we just don't know who will not suffer physical death. However the day is coming when as a believer you will be resurrected - that is called the first resurrection. All unbelievers will be left in the unseen state and it is they who will suffer the second death.

No believer will experience the second death.

Now we come to the most sober time in history, the judgement of the unbelievers. Revelation 20:11-15

'Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God and books were opened. And another book was opened which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.'

This is the time of judgement for every unbeliever. All the people at this judgement which is called the great white throne judgement are those who have rejected the message of the gospel. Notice that they are judged not according to their sins, because when Jesus died on the cross He died for the sins of the whole world, not just believers. The only sin mankind will be judged for is not having accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. That is what the bible calls the unforgiveable sin. The people at the great white throne judgement are those who have rejected the work of Jesus on the cross.

Do you remember we talked about death being the last enemy to be destroyed? It is at this point that Death and Hades – which is the unseen state where the unbelieving dead were held – are cast into the lake of fire. So death is finally destroyed.

Let's just look at what is meant by the second death – the first death is man's physical death. The second death is the time unbelievers are thrown into the lake of fire. Anyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will never experience the second death, and will never be judged at the great white throne.

If you look at human history there is only one place where God's love and His holiness come into perfect harmony and that is at the cross of Calvary. If ever you want to understand the love of God and the holiness of God and take the two of them together, it is at the cross. We see God's love first of all because Jesus came to die for the sins of the world and there is the love of God. The holiness of God is seen in

what Jesus suffered to propitiate God's wrath, the scourging, torture and butchery of the soldiers and when Jesus was put on the cross and the sins of the whole world were laid on Him that was so awful that darkness came on the land and no one could look at Him for a period of three hours – the **penalty** for sin was laid on Him.

There is no compromise, God is totally Holy and totally loving and that is the truth of the cross of Calvary.

THE JUDGEMENT OF BELIEVERS WORKS

Before we finish we do need to look at the judgement of believers' works. We know that we will not stand before the Great White Throne.

When is this judgement going to happen and how is it going to happen? Who is going to carry it out and where will we be, how are we going to be feeling while it is taking place? These are some of the questions that immediately spring to mind.

The judgement of our works is rather more like a quality control that you get in factories, where a team of people are busy producing television sets or something. There is usually another group of people called quality controllers; they are there, not to check up on the people on the assembly line, but to check the product. Their job is to check on the quality of the work itself. This is what the judgement of believers' works is all about. It is not judgement of us as believers directly: rather it is a judgement of our works. Every day we should be producing the good works that God Himself has prepared in advance for us to do and it is the quality of these works that will be judged.

Luke 8:5-15 and we see the parable of the sower. This whole thing has to do with production. It poses the question, how productive are we? A farming scene is in view, with bags of seed representing the word of God. A sower comes along and he sows the word, broadcasting it all over the field. The parable then deals with what happens to the seed after it falls on to the ground. The seed is all the same. What differs is the quality of the ground that it falls upon, and Jesus describes four categories of ground. The first is the wayside, that is the strip of ground by the side of the field that has been trodden down by the farmer. After many years it has become really hard and the seed bounces off. The birds then come and take it and eat it. This is a picture of an unbeliever, whose heart is hardened against the gospel. The word comes to his heart, but it bounces off.

From then on, however, the production of believers is described. The seed enters their hearts and remains. First there is some shallow soil which represents a shallow believer. The word of God comes along and is received, the seed sprouts quickly, exhibiting wonderful growth, but in the intense heat of the sun, the plant starts withering because it has no deep root. Do you know believers like that? They start off like shooting stars, receive the word, and begin to grow, but so soon as trials and difficulties come they stop growing and quickly wither up and they end up with zero production. There are going to be believers just like this, they will get to heaven, but will have nothing to show at all.

The second type of believer is then described, in this case, the seed is sown among the thorns. The thorns tangle around the growing shoot and choke it. This represents someone who receives the word of God,

who is truly born again but the cares of this world – a desire for riches or pleasure, or a concern for reputation – choke any growth. We might find that our friends do not like us now that we are Christians, so we tone down our commitment a bit; but it soon dwindles completely, the result is zero production again.

In the last category however, the seed falls on to good ground. It falls into good soil and grows to maturity, producing thirty, sixty or even a one hundredfold crop. Exactly how much is produced will again depend upon the quality of the ground – the soil of the heart.

It is possible to produce a hundredfold for God; but what it depends upon is the quality of the soil. The point is this – the seed is top quality; but how receptive are you to God? If you are not top quality ground, then even top quality seed will not produce a hundredfold, it may only produce sixtyfold, thirty fold, or less. You may only produce one-fold perhaps, in which case you will just about duplicate yourself and that's all.

We must remember it is only the Holy Spirit who can produce any good in us at all, and it is only as the Lord deals with our lives that the Holy Spirit can change our character and start flowing through us, enabling us to do good works for God. This is the only genuine production there is. The flesh can produce no good fruit or works at all – forget the feel good factor! That is 100% flesh – it makes me *feel* so good when I help someone out. Again, this is a principle, our good works have been prepared, in advance, by God, for us to do. Our part is to find out what those works of the Spirit yielding the fruit of the Spirit are, and live in them with all our strength. It is His work through us that counts, not our own goodness and strength.

I would not want to get to the judgement, or Bema seat of Christ only to find what I have been doing has been wood, hay and stubble and is going to be burnt up in the fire!

So when does this judgement of our works, not us remember, take place? We will be judged shortly *after* the rapture of the church. Knocks on the head a bit the idea that you will have to stay and be 'purified' if you aren't good enough for the rapture, doesn't it? You will remember there is a teaching going around right now that only a few will go up and the rest will have to stay to be purified! Again this maligns the character of God and is absolutely not the case. I really don't care how enthusiastic these folk are about their theories on the rapture, they are wrong! So the rapture will take place before our works are judged, so we are not talking about a judgement that could stop us going to heaven. Our sins have already been judged, so nothing can prevent us from getting there once we have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ – absolutely nothing. Nothing shall separate us from the love of God: not our biggest problem or our biggest fear (Romans 8:35-39). All believers shall be snatched away to heaven, because it does not depend on us, it depends on Christ and His work. Whether we have done hundreds of good works, or none at all, we shall always be with the Lord. Praise the Name of Jesus!

The day is shortly coming when the Lord Jesus shall descend from heaven with a shout, and He is going to come for one reason – because He doesn't want His bride on the earth any more.

So we shall have our works judged whilst the Tribulation is taking place on the earth. I want to emphasise that it is not **us** who will be judged, but our **works**.

The Judgement at the 'Bema' seat of Christ:

The judgement of believers' works is often referred to as the 'Judgement seat of Christ'. It is described in 2 Corinthians 5. Once we are up in heaven, the judgement seat of Christ will come into view. Imagine all of us arriving in heaven with a bag, which contains our works. We will not be judged, but our bag of works will be judged.

'Therefore we make it our aim, whether or present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done whether good or bad.' 2 Corinthians 5:9,10.

The judgement seat here spoken of was a raised platform on which a judge used to sit as he judged a particular case. It was usually quite small, although the one in Athens was 10 feet tall in view of the size of the crowds! We don't know how big the Lord's bema seat is going to be; I imagine it will be vast. Each one of us will arrive before this judgement seat with our own little bag of works.

The purpose of this judgement of our works, Jesus' quality control, is *'that each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done whether good or bad'*. The Greek actually says things done 'through' the body – it is not sin that is in view here but production. The things we have done while in our present earthly bodies.

Our works fall into two categories. They are either 'good works', carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit which means they are produced by His inspiration, motivation and energy, or they are works produced by our flesh, in which case, they are bad and worthless – what Isaiah calls, filthy rags, literally menstrual cloths! This is no light thing, it means that for all of us who are Christians some of our works originate from the flesh, while others are from the Spirit, they will be all mixed up in our 'bags'.

I am convinced that what is happening in some churches right now, where God is paring them down to the bone is because He wants to be able to give them **rewards** on that day and their works hitherto have been mainly works of the flesh, without their realising it. In His great mercy and love and desire to give them rewards, He is pulling them up short, in order to give them opportunity to repent change their minds, and bring forth good fruit from the good seed within them. Works initiated by His Spirit, not the flesh. That is the goodness, kindness and mercy of our God.

Unfortunately we are predisposed to being more impressed by works done in the flesh. We might think 'Aren't I good? Look what I've done, I did this!' but God is not impressed at all, because anything in the flesh is absolutely worthless – beware the 'feel good' factor – that will be your flesh. If it makes you have a warm fuzzy about yourself, beware Christian! The flesh has absolutely no connection with the Spirit, neither can have, works of the flesh are a stench in the nostrils of God. I repeat, only by the working of the Holy Spirit through us can we produce anything good. How we need a revelation of this!

1 Corinthians 3:11-16 is the major passage dealing with the judgement of believers' works. Paul wrote *'For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay straw, each one's work will become manifest for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?'* We cannot build on anything other than the foundation of Christ Himself. He is the foundation stone and the only foundation that is going to last. Everything must be based on Jesus: who He is, and on the fact that He died, rose from the dead, ascended and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father, interceding for us. It is all Christ! What we believe and how we live, must be based from beginning to end on Jesus Christ.

Whilst I was preparing this, I was referring to Roger Price's teaching and said to the Lord, 'He didn't shrink from the whole counsel of God did he?' the Lord's reply to me instantly was 'Neither should you'.

The point is this, if you are laying a floor and you start off at one corner out of alignment, by the time you get to the other side the whole thing is crooked. You cannot build on any other foundation than Jesus. Our gifts are not the foundation, our beliefs are not the foundation, Jesus is. Plus nothing. That is why the Word of God is so important. We must have our foundations in. Joyce Meyer did a series of talks entitled 'Do you have a crack in your foundations?' I think many people sitting in churches have got just that!

In Isaiah 40 there is a description of the works of the flesh. Isaiah is told to 'Cry out!' very wisely he says 'what?' God is here asking him to go out into the main street and holler at the top of his voice, but very astutely he asks what to yell first! "All flesh is grass" – that was what he was told to shout "All flesh. Grass!" literally. God was saying all your works, done in your own strength, grass, they will burn. There is nothing enduring in works of the flesh.

So in 1 Corinthians 3 we find two categories of building materials. We can either build with gold, silver and jewels, or we can build with wood, hay and straw. You couldn't get two more contrasting sets of material. The first endure. And others, have no enduring qualities whatsoever. Point taken.

So the question for you at the end of this day is – what are you personally building with? Are you building with the things of the Spirit, or the things of the flesh, your own ideas of good works. Will your works stand the fire and come through, or will they go up? If you are dashing around in your own zeal with your own agenda and enthusiasm, using your own strength – you are not doing the works of God through faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. Busyness is no sign of spiritual increase.

It is not man's reputation, personality, ability to speak, knowledge or anything else that counts. None of these truly count for anything. It is how much the Holy Spirit is doing through your life and mine that really counts. We are all on equal terms when it comes to this judgement. You might be intelligent, while someone else might not be so gifted. But both of you have the Holy Spirit inside, so you both can produce the fruit of the Spirit and good works for God. The Holy Spirit is the great equaliser. He turns fools into great and wise men of God. He takes the weak and the foolish, and He transforms them into towers of

strength. Beloved, it is nothing to do with what you can do in the natural – that brings us all down to the same level doesn't it? And we can say with Paul *'I can do all things, through Christ, who strengthens me'*. Outside of Him, zilch!

O.K. we've looked at the negative, now let's look at the positive. How do we produce enduring works and how do we guard against producing works that will be burnt up?

There are two specific 'Do not's' in the Bible that instruct us.

In Ephesians 4:30 Paul says *'and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption'*. Don't cause the Holy Spirit to cry within you. It is our sin that primarily causes Him to weep. He is grieved when we refuse to walk in the light with God and try to live independently. He is grieved if you are allowing unconfessed sin in your life – because before you can produce fruit (good works) for God, we have to be in fellowship with Him. That's why 1 John 1:9 is so important. Keeping short accounts with God.

The second 'Do not' is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 where Paul says *'Do not quench the Spirit.'* Don't smother His fire within you because of what people might think – paraphrase. 'I'm too shy' 'What would people think of me?' 'I'm not good enough' all these will quench the Spirit within. Settle it, in you, dwells no good thing, but in Christ, everything! So let Him burn, He is burning with love for Jesus and He wants to burn in each of us. As soon as He is allowed to work through us, we will begin to produce works of lasting quality, that will go through the fire untouched. And we shall receive a reward – isn't God good. He does it all, and we get the reward!

So exactly what is the reward? Crowns. Crowns will be given to faithful believers. Our piles of works which last through the fire are going to be replaced by crowns. In 1 Corinthians 9 there is a short phrase that compares our reward with that of an athlete *'Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown'*.

Paul again in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 says *'I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day and not to me only, but also to all who have loved His appearing'*.

Paul is on death row. Soon to die he was confident of his reward. Notice how he mentioned those who love the Lord's appearing. These are the people who can die very readily because they have spent their lives truly serving Jesus. They are looking forward to dying – Graham Cooke says he's going to take a running jump at death, he's looking forward to it – they are looking forward to dying and to the Lord's Return. They haven't wasted a second.

Paul said *'I have fought the good fight'* this word fought is where we get our word 'agonize' from, it is *agonizomai*. He knew the word of God, he knew Whom he had believed (2 Timothy 1:12) and he knew that ahead of him was a wonderful crown, the reward of a righteous life.

Question is, do you want that kind of assurance, and if you do, will you have to make mid-course

corrections to get it? I believe we can have this assurance without being presumptuous – that the work we have done has glorified God, not us, and has been done for Him and through the power of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing wrong with looking towards the winning post and our rewards.

So where does this all fit with the book of Revelation? Revelation 4:10,11 *‘The twenty four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne saying: “You are worthy O lord to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created”’*. Every one of us is going to do the same. Cast our crowns before Him – we are going to enter the Throne Room of God on that great day, beholding Him in all His glorious majesty and power, and we are going to throw those crowns down before Him at His beautiful feet.

It follows therefore, that it cannot be wrong to desire a crown. I want Jesus to have the biggest and best crowns. The more I can gain the better. I don’t want other people’s praise, I just want to give Him my best, I want to hear His ‘Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord’.

That is why my beloved friends, we must allow God to be glorified by the Holy Spirit working through us: and we will glorify Him by casting our crowns before Him. The judgement seat is coming – consider all this in your hearts and determine to give Him your very best. Let what we do in thought, word or deed redound to the glory of God!

God bless you and thank you for listening – tomorrow, the culmination of all things.