

Ministry of Grace

Revelation Chapter 20

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ²And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

⁴Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

⁷And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Notes

Revelation 20:1, 2

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ²And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,

We are not told who this angel is. Some speculate that this is Christ, while others claim it is Michael, the archangel. However, this angel is unidentified and is best considered simply one of God's angels.

“**And**” – Some translations have this as “Then.” This is from the Greek word *kai*, connecting this event with the previous events described in chapter nineteen.

“**bottomless pit**” – Greek *abussos*, meaning “an extremely deep place” from which we get our English word “abyss.”

“**chain**” – Greek *aluisis*, meaning “chains for the hands or feet, that is, manacles or shackles”

“**seized**” – Greek *ekratēsen*, a form of the verb *krateō* which is derived from the noun *kratos*, meaning strength. This verb means “to use strength, to take hold of, or to hold fast.”

“**the dragon**” – Greek *ho drakōn*, meaning “the dragon,” from *derchomai*, meaning “to look at.” The dragon is a huge serpent whose eyesight is very acute. The Greeks called the dragon a species of serpent because he could see so well and because of his serpentine shape.

“**serpent**” – Greek *ophis*, which means “a snake” or “a serpent.”

“**the devil**” – Greek *diabolos*, which is from the verb *diaballō*. This word is made up of *dia*, meaning “through” and *ballō*, meaning “to cast” or “to throw.” This verb actually means “to accuse,” therefore, *diabolos* means “an accuser.”

“**Satan**” – Greek *ho satanas*, which literally means “the adversary.”

Literally, this verse reads, “He grabbed the dragon, the old serpent, who is an accuser and the adversary, and bound him a thousand years.”

“**bound**” – From the Greek word *deō*, meaning “to tie” or “to bind up.”

Satan is not the first spirit being to be bound in the abyss:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (*tartaros*) and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; (**2 Peter 2:4**)

These are possibly the beings shaped like locusts with scorpion stings in their tails who were released from the abyss in **Revelation 9:1-11**.

Also, notice that the demons called “Legion” begged Jesus not to send them to the abyss:

Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss (*abussos*). (**Luke 8:30-31**)

“a thousand years” – Greek *chilia etē*, which literally means “a thousand years.” These same two Greek words are repeated in verses 3,4,5,6, and 7, where they are properly translated as a thousand years.

The constant references to a thousand years have given rise to this period being referred to as the Millennium. There are three basic views on the millennium, partially distinguished by how scripture, and prophecy in particular, are interpreted. Following is a brief description of these three viewpoints. In addition, there are numerous interpretations that result from a combining of the ideas of amillennialism and postmillennialism.

Premillennialism – This is based on a literal interpretation of all scripture. According to this view Christ will return to earth in bodily form at the end of the Tribulation and will rule on the earth for a thousand years. This was the position of the apostolic church which was universally expressed by the church fathers until about the third century.

Amillennialism – This is based on a literal interpretation of all scripture *except* prophecy of the future, which they interpret allegorically. Interestingly, many amillennialists believe that prophecy which has already been fulfilled (particularly that of the first advent of Christ) has been fulfilled literally. The amillennial viewpoint was first espoused by the powerful church of Alexandria in Northern Africa during the third century AD. The chief proponent of this view was Augustine. He advanced the idea that the thousand years are a literal one thousand years, but they occur in the inter-advent period, the period between the birth of Christ and the triumphal return of Christ to earth. Because this denies a future millennium after the second advent, this interpretation has been labeled “amillennial.”

But, now that there have been more than a thousand years since the first advent of Christ, those who hold to the Augustinian view of the millennium do not believe in a literal one thousand years as Augustine did. This was the belief of many of the reformers and is largely maintained by those of the Reformed tradition. Still other amillennialists believe in the Kingdom of God but do not see it as Christ literally reigning on earth. They believe the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah’s kingdom are being fulfilled now, either by the saints reigning with Christ in heaven, or (spiritually, not literally) by the church on earth. Far from disbelieving in the Millennium, amillennialists believe we are in it now.

Postmillennialism – This is based on a non-literal, symbolic interpretation of prophecy (though all but the most liberal of them consider the millennium to be a literal one thousand years). According to this view, which arose during the seventeenth century AD, Christ will return at the end of the Millennium. Postmillennialism teaches that before Christ’s return there will be a period of peace and harmony throughout the earth. This golden age will be ushered in by the conversion of most of the world to Christianity. The millennial kingdom will be established by the church, not by the personal intervention of Jesus Christ. And, according to this belief, Christ will not reign personally on earth during the Millennium, but through His church. With the coming of the twentieth century, its two world wars, and growing anti-Christian sentiment throughout the world, this viewpoint has been abandoned or significantly modified by many of its proponents.

Revelation 20:3

³and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

“**shut it**” – From the Greek word *kleiō*, meaning “to close” or “shut.”

“**sealed it over him**” – This is from two Greek words, *spragidzō* and *epanō*. *Spragidzō* means “to seal up” or “close up” in order to keep the contents secret. *Epanō*, which is made up of *epi*, meaning “upon” or “over” and *anō*, meaning “above.” Put together, these two words indicate a seal that is placed over the location in order to keep it secret.

“**deceive**” – From the Greek *planaō*, meaning “to cause to wander” or “to deceive.”

During the millennium Satan will be bound and not able to cause people to wander from believing that God is reigning in Jerusalem. But after the thousand years, Satan will be released, bringing rebellion against God once again (see verses 7 and 8).

Revelation 20:4

⁴Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

“**seated on them were those to whom ...**” – Nowhere are we told specifically who is sitting on the thrones as judges. We can surmise who is included there from the following:

The 12 Disciples were told that they would sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel:

Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (**Matthew 19:28**)

The Church saints are told that they will reign as kings and priests and will judge the world:

The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. (**Revelation 3:21**)

and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth. (**Revelation 5:10**)

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? (**1 Corinthians 6:2**)

“**Also I saw the souls of those ...**” – Literally this reads, “and the souls of those ...” What the text says is that John saw the thrones and the ones sitting on them and the souls of those who had been beheaded. This indicates that the ones who were martyred are different from those who sat on the thrones.

“**They came to life and reigned**” – The word translated “came to life” is a form of *dzaō* which is always used in the New Testament with reference to physical life, not spiritual life.

These martyrs, though not sitting as judges, nonetheless will reign with Christ during the Millennium.

Revelation 20:5, 6

⁵The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

“**the rest of the dead**” – This appears to be a description of the “goats” in the Sheep and Goat Judgment. Those who reject God during the tribulation and receive the mark of the beast will be cast into Hades to be tormented until the Great White Throne described in verses eleven through fifteen.

“**the first resurrection**” – Since this specific resurrection (of the tribulation martyrs) is not the first one talked about in the New Testament, what does this expression mean?

Resurrections that occurred before this one include:

- **Jesus Christ**
 - **Some Old Testament saints at the resurrection of Christ** – The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. (**Matthew 27:52, 53**)
 - **Christians** – But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (**I Thessalonians 4:13-18**)
 - **Believing Jews** – At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (**Dan 12:1, 2**)

According to John F. Walvoord in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*:

It would seem clear from these facts that the term “the first resurrection” is not an event but an order of resurrection including all the righteous who are raised from the dead before the millennial kingdom begins. They are “first” in contrast to those who are raised last, after the millennium, then the wicked dead are raised and judged. Just as there are two kinds of physical death, namely, the first death which results in burial, and the

second death which is described as being cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14), so there are two kinds of resurrection, a first resurrection having to do with the resurrection of the righteous, and a second resurrection having to do with the wicked. They are separated by at least one thousand years. Just as the first death did not occur to all in one moment but is experienced individually by those who die over a long period of time, so the first resurrection is fulfilled according to the groups that are in view. (Walvoord, 1989)

Revelation 20:7-9

⁷And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,

At the end of the millennium Satan will be released from the abyss and will stir up yet another rebellion against God.

“**Gog and Magog**” – Some would have this to be the same as the battle of Gog and Magog described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. There are some noted differences, however. In Ezekiel 38 Gog and Magog are described as being from the far north of Jerusalem whereas in this reference they are from the four corners of the earth (all over the earth). In Ezekiel 39 the army of Gog and Magog fall on the mountains of Israel and their bodies will be eaten by birds and beasts of the field and they will be buried throughout the land, wherever their bodies are found, for seven months. Also their weapons will be burned for seven years after the battle. In the current verses the armies of Gog and Magog are completely consumed by fire, not eaten by animals or buried and it appears that the Great White Throne Judgment takes place almost immediately after this battle.

“**consumed**” – This is from the Greek verb *katephagen* which is made up of *kata*, used as an intensifier and a form of *esthiō*, meaning “to eat, devour, or consume.” Hence, this word means that the armies of Gog and Magog are completely consumed (nothing left of the bodies).

Revelation 20: 10

¹⁰and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

At the end of this rebellion Satan will be cast into the lake of fire where he will be tormented eternally. Note that the beast and the false prophet are already there having been cast alive into the lake of fire at the end of the Tribulation (**Revelation 19:20**).

Revelation 20:11

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.

The Great White Throne occurs **after the Millennium**, when the current heavens and earth are destroyed. Note that there was found no place for them (the current heaven and earth). Therefore they will no longer exist. Peter tells us:

waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! (**2 Peter 3:12**)

The word here translated as “dissolved” is a form of *luo*, which means “to let loose.” One thing that has baffled scientists who study the building blocks of all elements, the atom, is the fact that in the nucleus there are neutrons (no electrical charge) and protons (positive charge) which are held very tightly together. This is unexplainable since all like charges are known to repel each other, so the protons should fly apart from each other. And, when this nucleus is split apart by an outside force it releases a tremendous amount of energy in the form of heat (nuclear fission). When the heavens and earth are “let loose” by God they will “be let loose” with great heat!

Revelation 20:12

¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

Those who stand before the Great White Throne are “the dead.” Since believers have all been brought to life to experience the Millennium, they are not dead. Also, John records what Jesus said about all those who believe God’s word:

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (**John 5:24**)

If no believer shall come into judgment and all have passed from death unto life then they cannot be among the dead ones in **Revelation 20:12**.

These will be judged based on their works, which are written in the books. Even though the “books” and “the Book of Life” are mentioned, these souls will only be judged by what is written in the “books.” And, we know that by works of law shall no flesh be justified in His sight (**Romans 3:20**), therefore they will all be found guilty.

Revelation 20:13

¹³And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

This is a description of the uniting of the spirits of the lost souls with their bodies whether they have been lost at sea or buried in the earth (Death). These new, resurrected bodies will exist eternally to suffer in the lake of fire.

Notice again that these will be judged according to their works.

Revelation 20:14, 15

¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

“This is the second death” – The first death is physical death, whereas the second death is spiritual death. The word “death” means separation. In the case of physical death it is separation from those who are still living physically. In the case of the second death, they are separated from the presence of God for all eternity. This may be the worst part of the suffering they must endure.

“if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life” – On the surface it appears from this verse that not all are cast into the lake of fire. The grammatical construction of this sentence, however, is what is known as a “first class conditional” sentence in Greek grammar. It is a conditional statement that assumes that the first part of the statement (the protasis) is true; therefore the second part (the apodosis) is also true. For this reason, the “if” in this type of construction is sometimes translated as “since.” Thus it would read, **“And since no one's name was found ...”** Remember that these are judged by the things written in “the books.” Since this is a judgment of the dead, no one has works of righteousness worth anything. This is another reason to believe that none of the dead are found written in the book of life. All who appear at the Great White Throne Judgment will be cast into the lake of fire! **This is the second (and final) death!**

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