

REVELATION

Seeing, Knowing and Serving Jesus Christ
Today at the Edge of History

Chapter 20

Text: Revelation 20:1-15 - The Millennium & The Book of Life

The Thousand Years

20 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

⁴ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Satan's Doom

⁷ When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across



**Michaelangelo: Sistine Chapel,
The Last Judgment (ca. 1540)**

the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

The Dead Are Judged

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged

according to what he had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.



**Gustave Doré: The Last
Judgment (1861)**

Read & Reflect - 20:1-15

First Reading/First Impression: Which word pair best captures this description of final judgment for you?

- Fear & Trembling* *Grace & Peace* *confidence & Gratitude*
 Doom & Gloom *Truth & Consequences* *Other* _____

Second Reading/The Main Point: In the end, who wins? *The Lord God* *Evil / The Devil*
(In light of this, whom would it be wise for us to choose and serve today?)

Search

20:1-6 - During the “thousand years” (= the millennium) what happens to each of these:

A. The dragon / ancient serpent / devil / Satan:

B. Those killed because they stood firm and testified to their trust in Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior:

C. The rest of the people who have died:

20:7-10 - What does the devil do as soon as he is released from bondage? What do God and Magog (symbolic of all the nations of the world - see Ezekiel 38-39) do then? What happens to them?

20:11-15 - Who stands before the “great white throne” of judgment?

Who “gives up the dead?” What happens to them? What does this tell us about who/what has final authority over us?

Where do we want our names to be written? How do they get there? (see 3:5; John 5:24; Ephesians 2:8-9)

Apply

If someone you loved came to you and said they had just read Revelation 20 and were afraid of what was going to happen to them at the end of the world, what would you say to them?

Every time we see a new convert to the church we are seeing testimony that Satan's ability to deceive the nations is taken away.
- Michael Wilcox

Notes on Revelation 20:1-15

Summary... Having shown the final defeat of Babylon the Great and the two beasts, John's vision now turns to the ultimate enemy of God and His people, the one who has been working through these puppet powers all along: *"the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan."* Having been decisively defeated in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus (see chapter 12), now he joins his henchmen in the lake of fire, the place of final and eternal punishment and torment. Then humanity is judged. Then the throne room comes into view again, but this time the field of vision is dominated by the throne of God alone. It is time for humanity to be judged. Two kinds of books are mentioned. One kind records the works of human beings, all of them, great and small, all who have lived and died on earth. What we do matters. It is remembered. The other kind of book is one unique record called "The Book of Life." It is this book that matters most, for those whose names are found in here are saved from the "lake of fire" where the devil's fate is shared. Some call this "The Lamb's Book of Life" and suggest that what is recorded in it is not the deeds of people but only their names along with the deeds of the Lamb (see Isaiah 53)! Darrell Johnson (*Discipleship on the Edge*, p.357) in light of these images makes the following observation:

"We are all going to die. And each of us is going to have to give an accounting for our lives. On that day we have two options. The first option is to take our stand on the basis of what we have done with our lives. The second option is to take our stand on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done with His life. I shall exercise option two. I find no hope in option one."

20:1 - **"I saw an angel coming down..."** Elsewhere in Revelation when John speaks of an angel ascending or descending he then moves backward in time... What is articulated here may well be a description of things that happen before the preceding battle scene... It makes much sense to see most of the

words of this chapter as describing things that are already true.

20:2-3 - **"dragon... ancient serpent..."** the names refer back to Genesis 3... Commentators point out that many of the themes of these last three chapters of the Bible parallel those of the first three chapters!... **"bound"**... when exactly Satan is restricted and how is a point of contention... This may be simply a way of saying that the work of the church (Matthew 28:18-20 -- *"making disciples of all nations"*) is made possible by the binding of *"the strong man"* (Mark 3:27)!...

"thousand years"... this is the famous (infamous?) millennium (see page 4) which some see as a literal period of 1,000 years and others see as a symbol meaning "a very long period of time"... **"Abyss"**... different than the **"lake of fire"** (20:10, 15)...

20:4-5 - **"thrones... authority to judge"**... this may refer to the whole church, those who believe in and belong to Christ (see Ephesians 2:6 & Matthew 16:19)... **"came to life... reigned with Christ"** after **"the first resurrection"**... could refer to the completed work of Christ, His resurrection made effective through the faith of His followers (see 5:10 - they already *"reign with Him"* - & John 5:21-25 - the one who believes *"has passed out of death to life"*)... **"the rest of the dead"**... may be the non-martyrs or the non-believers...

20:6 - **"Blessed..."** the fifth of seven Beatitude sayings in the book... **"second death"**... defined in v.14 as the "lake of fire," this happens after the "first death" (physical death) and involves inescapable, eternal punishment with the devil... **"priests of God..."** This is another statement of what has already been said to be already true (see 1:6 - He... *"has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father..."*

20:7-10 - **"Gog and Magog"**... these names stand for all the nations of the world standing against God (see Ezekiel 38-39)... **"battle"**... may be the same one mentioned in 19:11 and following...



Albrecht Dürer: *The Angel with the Key to the Bottomless Pit*

20:11 - **"great white throne"**... this symbol of purity and authority along with the one sitting on it (God and the Lamb) is the dominant image in the throne room now... it is time for judgment... **"Earth and sky fled from his presence... no place for them..."**

The old things are contaminated beyond redemption... A new heaven and a new earth are needed... 20:12 - **"the dead, great and small"**... everybody must stand before the pure white throne for judgment... **"books... book of life..."** see summary section above... There is a first judgment based on what people have done, but this doesn't appear to be the important and final judgment (which seems to depend on having one's name in the book of life, the key image of this judgment scene - see also 3:5)... 20:13-14 - **sea... death... Hades..."** the place of chaos and the place of the dead (in Hebrew tradition Hades is not a place of judgment necessarily. It is simply the place where the dead go)... both, along with death itself, must give up their temporary catches at the command of God... **"death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire..."** We have already seen that God turns the raging sea of chaos into something smooth as glass (4:6). Now we see the destruction of death itself. Now we realize that there is no more need for a "holding place" for the departed... Judgment has come and now the dead will go to horrific eternal punishment or glorious eternal reward... Based on God's grace in Christ through their faith in Christ symbolized here by inclusion in His **"book of life."**

Teaching the Word of God

A Back Page Thought -----

----- from Pastor Jay

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A few years ago, someone I'd never met approached me and asked, "What are your views on the Millennium?" The odd thing to me at the time was that this was a first time visitor to our church. He didn't ask me if I loved Jesus Christ or what my views on the Resurrection were. He wanted to know where I stood on the Millennium, something that the Bible mentions nowhere but in a few verses of Revelation chapter 20. I invited the young man into my office and we chatted for a while. I told him I liked the approach of some of my teachers and would rather be known as a "Pan-millennialist"... "What's that?" he asked... "Somebody who trusts that because of Jesus everything will 'pan out' in the end!" I suspect that that was not a good enough answer for him because the young man never came back to our church.

Differing views about what Revelation 20:1-6 means have put devout followers of Christ into passionately opposing camps for years and years, and that is a sad reality especially when we consider that the truths these views agree about is so much more significant than what they dispute. The three basic approaches (charted below) are called Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, & Amillennialism. Each view has its strengths and weaknesses.

Pre-millennialists hold that things keep getting worse and worse here on earth until finally Jesus returns, binds the Devil and puts His saints in charge with Him here on earth for a literal 1,000 year period. After this time Satan is released for a final doomed attempt to destroy. History concludes with the final destruction of Satan and evil and the judgment of humankind... The danger of this view lies in its pessimism. One can find himself applauding tragedies because they are "bringing the end times closer" while overlooking the real

power of the Gospel today.

The **Post-millennialist** says that things are getting better and better here on earth because the preaching of the Gospel is changing the world for the better. And soon things will be so good around here that we will see a new and glorious and (usually said to be) literal 1,000 years of unprecedented success in bringing people into the Kingdom of God. It is only after this time that Jesus returns and history is concluded. The optimism of this view makes it hard to reconcile with the reality of evil in our world.

According to the **A-millennialists**, there is no literal "1,000 years." The "1,000" is actually another symbolic number and refers to the "very large number of years" between the 1st coming of Jesus and His 2nd coming. Jesus "bound Satan" when He came the first time, defeating him through His death on the cross and His subsequent Resurrection. His kingdom is here, but it is a kingdom that abides first and foremost in the hearts of His followers and has not been fully realized and manifested yet in the world. Just before Jesus returns to bring history to its rightful conclusion, Satan will be released for a final vain explosion of wickedness. I am most sympathetic to this view (as our visitor suspected), but it too has weaknesses, especially this: As we keep seeing things symbolically, we may be tempted to deny the realities that they represent. Sin is real. The gospel is powerful. Jesus is coming back. These are not simply interesting thoughts: They are crucial realities!

And what do these views agree about?... 1. Jesus Christ, the Lamb, is now on the throne. The Lord of History reigns now. 2. The dragon is already defeated. 3. The Church exists now in partnership with Jesus. 4. Jesus will bring things to a fitting end (not us) and the glory will be His (not ours). 5. What is coming is far better than anything we have ever experienced before, a glorious new heaven and new earth! That is something for all of us Christians to celebrate. Together.

