



Revelation - Chapter Twenty

VIII. Revelation 19:11-20:15 - The defeat and destruction of the beasts, the dragon, and death (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twenty

Then John saw an angel come down from heaven with a key and a great chain to the bottomless pit in his hand. This angel captured Satan, bound him, and threw him into the pit for a thousand years. After the thousand years, he will be released for a little while to deceive. This was followed by the first resurrection, where those who did not receive the mark of the beast or worship him or his image came to life and reigned with Christ in his millennial Kingdom.

After the thousand years were ended, Satan was released to deceive the nations whose number is like the sand of the sea. Those deceived surrounded the camp of the saints to battle but God sent fire down from heaven to consume them, and the Devil was thrown into the lake of fire to join the beast and the false prophet to be tormented forever.

Then John saw the great white throne and the final judgement take place. This is where the dead were judged according to what they had done. After this judgement those judged, whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life, will be thrown into the lake of fire which is the second death.

VIII.c Revelation 20:1-6 - Interlude: The thousand years

These verses are among the most controversial in Revelation. Responsible scholars disagree regarding the meaning of the thousand years in vv.2-7. The three main views are represented by:

1. Premillennialists, i.e. those who believe Christ will return before the millennium, think that this thousand year period is a future time of great peace and justice, which is usually thought to be a literal one thousand year period that will begin when Christ returns to reign on earth as a physically present King, and which will include resurrected believers reigning with him.

2. Postmillennialists, those who believe that Christ will return after the millennial period, think that before Christ returns to earth the Gospel will spread and triumph so powerfully that societies will be transformed and peace and justice will reign on earth for a thousand years, or for a long period of time, after which Christ will return for the final judgement.
3. Amillennialists, those who hold a non-literal millennial view, think this thousand years is the same period as this present church age, and that there will be no future millennium before Christ returns for the final judgement.

Related to this is the question of whether the thousand years are to be interpreted literally, most premillennialists hold to this view; or symbolically, as most postmillennialists and amillennialists, and some premillennialists believe. Those holding each view read John's millennial vision in terms of their understanding of other biblical texts and their approach to prophetic literature as a whole. Likewise, each of these views falls within the framework of historic Christian orthodoxy.

¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, ³ and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

Revelation 20:1-3

I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit. The angel had presumably been given the key by Jesus: <<*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades*>> (Revelation 1:17-18).

The dragon is identified as that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, as in 12:9-17, which portrayed its expulsion from God's heavenly court and the thwarting of its efforts to destroy the church.

The dragon's being bound with a great chain and thrown into the bottomless pit, which is locked and sealed, symbolises God's restriction of Satan's ability to inflict harm for a long but limited era. God's purpose is that Satan would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended.

The nature of this binding of Satan is important to the three millennial views:

- Premillennialists read this as predicting a complete removal of Satan from the earth during a future golden age, i.e. the millennium, of social righteousness, international peace, and physical well-being, with Christ reigning on earth. They argue that the phrase 'locked and sealed it over him' picture a removal of Satan from the earth too complete to represent the current age.

- Postmillennialists also think this will be a future golden age, but that Christ will not return until the end of that time.
- Amillennialists note that the NT affirms that Jesus' First Coming has already bound Satan: <<But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered>> (Mark 3:27), and brought God's light to the nations: <<He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: 'Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned'>> (Matthew 4:13-16), <<for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel>> (Luke 2:30-32), <<'Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy'>> (Acts 14:15-17), and: <<While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead'>> (Acts 17:30-31). Therefore they argue that this binding of Satan for a thousand years refers to the Gospel's spread among all nations during the present age, and to the present restraint of the church's persecutors until an outbreak of rebellion before Christ's return; refer to 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8.

After that he must be let out for a little while. Once the thousand years of a world free of satanic influence under the lordship of Christ has passed, Satan will once again be let loose. The sad reality is that there will still be plenty of people who will choose to follow him in this final brief period of history despite the reality of what they would come to know of a world without him.

⁴ Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshipped 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. ⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.

Revelation 20:4-5

I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. Premillennialists argue that <<coming down from heaven>> (v.1), and the

reference to <<***the nations***>> (v.3), show that these **thrones** are on earth during Christ's millennial reign. Amillennialists argue that the echoes in these verses are from Daniel's vision: <<***As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire***>> (Daniel 7:9), and signal that the thrones are in heaven. Those sitting in judgement will be Christ and his saints: <<***and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel***>> (Luke 22:29-30), and: <<***Do you not know that we are to judge angels – to say nothing of ordinary matters?***>> (1 Corinthians 6:3).

Whatever view one takes of the millennium, **the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God** probably represents just a few of all the people represented by the words **and those who had not worshiped the beast**. **And those** represents Greek *kai hoitines*, which can also be translated 'and whoever', 'and everyone who'.

These faithful believers **came to life**. Premillennialists think this means that deceased believers will experience bodily resurrection at the beginning of the millennium, and that this is what is meant by **this is the first resurrection**; they say this is the clear meaning of the aorist indicative of *zaō*, i.e. 'live', 'come to life'.

Amillennialists think **they came to life** and **the first resurrection** mean their souls entered into the presence of God in heaven after they died, and their deaths were in fact their victory over the dragon and the beast (12:11 and 15:2), imparting to them a foretaste of the final resurrection (vv.12-15). Some postmillennialists agree with the amillennial view of **the first resurrection**, while other postmillennialists think it refers to the future victory of Christianity in the world after its earlier persecution.

And reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Premillennialists think that this means that these resurrected believers will assist with Christ's thousand-year reign as righteous King over the whole earth. Amillennialists think this means deceased believers now, and during the entire one thousand years, which means the time from Pentecost to the Second Coming, are reigning with Christ from heaven. Postmillennialists see it as a future triumph of Christianity in the world.

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. The premillennialists would argue that **the rest of the dead** refers to unbelievers. The saints of the ages who died before the sixth seal are resurrected between seals six and seven, and those beheaded after the rapture are resurrected at the beginning of the millennial period. The general resurrection of the wicked occurs at the end of the Millennial Kingdom. The amillennialists must argue that **the rest of the dead** refers to the wicked and perhaps some righteous. However, this causes a major problem. If **come to life** is spiritual in v.4, then it must be spiritual in v.5 too. Problem: how do the wicked **come to life** in a spiritual sense? If **come to life** is spiritual in v.4, how can the same verb refer to physical life in v.5 without any textual clues to help the reader understand this change?

⁶ Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these 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.

Revelation 20:6

Blessed is Revelation's fifth of seven benedictions; refer to the comments made on 1:3 and the supplementary material on the web site. The beatitude announces the importance of having a part in **the first resurrection**. All of those who have a part in it are **blessed and holy**. This clearly limits **the first resurrection** to the righteous. Even if the Revelation does not label a resurrection after the 1000 years as 'the second resurrection', this beatitude makes such a conclusion an absolute necessity. There must be a resurrection in which those who have a part are devoid of holiness.

The second death. When the wicked are returned to bodily existence and condemned for evil deeds, they will be cast eternally into the lake of fire (vv.12-15). This is another reason why those **who share in the first resurrection** are **blessed** because **death has no power** or authority over them. They have already been judged to be faithful and true to Christ: <<*Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life*>> (John 5:24).

The victors, who maintain their testimony of Jesus and resist the beast, worship as **priests** and **reign** as kings with **Christ** throughout the era of Satan's binding.

VIII.d Revelation 20:7-10 - Satan's Doom

Satan's release after the thousand years will free him to deceive the nations and to gather them for the last battle. Amillennialists see this as the same battle as the one described in 16:13-16 and 19:17-21. Premillennialists see this as a separate, later battle.

The gathered armies are called Gog and Magog, titles of Israel's pagan oppressors, who would be destroyed by fire from heaven (Ezekiel 38:22 and 39:6), and consumed as carrion (Ezekiel 39:1-6 and Revelation 19:17-18).

Although the saints are exposed as a camp and, as inhabitants of God's beloved city (11:2 and 21:2), are besieged by foes as countless as the sand of the sea; their enemies will be consumed by God's fiery judgement. The deceiver will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur to join the beast and the false prophet forever.

⁷ When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. ⁹ They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. ¹⁰ And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Revelation 20:7-10

When the thousand years are ended transitions the reader to the end of the one thousand year period. No details are given concerning what occurred during the one thousand year period. The fact that the author has referred to a period consisting of one thousand years six times fails to dent those who attempt to interpret the numbers of Revelation spiritually. John indicates that this period will begin, cover a certain period of time and end with a significant event.

Satan will be released from his prison marks a significant event about to take place. That Satan's confinement can be correctly defined as a prison is confirmed.

Satan will come out to deceive the nations, which are in the four-corners of the earth, indicates his intent he is released. He will resume his campaign to overthrow the Son of the woman who rules over the nations. It is interesting to note that the bible uses the same reference to denote the nations from which the exiles will be recalled: *<<He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth>>* (Isaiah 11:12).

The background behind the names Gog and Magog is found in Ezekiel 38:1-4, where certain hostile forces come against Israel. Ezekiel was instructed to denounce these enemies and prophesy their overthrow by the Lord himself. Whether the precise historical application of Ezekiel's prophecy can be identified for certain is irrelevant. The point is this: A vicious enemy, seemingly an overwhelming power, would come against the Lord's people. But Israel would not be vanquished. Jehovah himself would intervene and be their Saviour. So, in like fashion, John borrows this imagery from the former prophet and applies it to what some scholars believe is a projected terminal assault against truth at some point shortly before the return of Christ. When this might occur, and in what form it could manifest itself, is not revealed; but the outcome is certain.

They are as numerous as the sands of the sea describes the enormous army Satan deceives into fighting. This is a figure of speech used in Scripture to indicate overwhelming numbers: *<<So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance – like the sand of the sea – that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure>>* (Genesis 41:49), *<<They came out, with all their troops, a great army, in number like the sand on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots>>* (Joshua 11:4), *<<The Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the east lay along the valley as thick as locusts; and their camels were without number, countless as the sand on the seashore>>* (Judges 7:12), and: *<<Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, 'as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore'>>* (Hebrews 11:12).

They marched up over the breadth of the earth indicates that the place where this final battle between Satan and his forces, and Christ will be fought. The breadth of the earth translates the Greek word *platos*, which means 'the measurement of width'. This suggests that the idea of the text is that this innumerable horde with Satan travelled the breadth of the earth, i.e. from the four corners, to get to the battle.

Surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city is the destination of the innumerable hordes with Satan. Camp translates the Greek word *paremballein*. It can refer to either an army or encampment of people. The encampment of the saints and the beloved city is surrounded by the innumerable hordes.

The beloved city naturally refers to Jerusalem. However, whether it is the New Jerusalem or not is the question. That Jerusalem will be a new city during the Millennial Kingdom cannot be debated. Revelation 16:19 declares that Jerusalem will be destroyed by the most powerful earthquake ever experienced on the earth during the bowl judgements. Whether this New Jerusalem will be the eternal New Jerusalem is open for debate.

And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. This explains God's solution to the problem. He burns up the wicked. What happens to the saints living on the earth at this time with natural, non-glorified bodies is not detailed. If they received instant glorification, it is not suggested.

The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet were. The deceiver's final destination is eternal torment with those who had allied themselves with him. This is not his annihilation; it will go on forever: they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Mount Vesuvius is best known for its eruption in AD79 that led to the burying and destruction of the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Its imagery in the 1st Century would have been that of a lake of fire and sulphur and many of the early readers of Revelation may have had this image as the place depicted in John's vision of ultimate hell. It was also the ingredients used by God for destruction in his anger against gross depravity: <<*Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground*>> (Genesis 19:24-25).

VIII.e Revelation 20:11-15 - The Dead Are Judged

All the dead will be raised from the grave and the sea, to be judged either by their deeds recorded in the books, or by God's gracious registration of their names in the Lamb's 'book of life'. This judgement was announced in 11:18.

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them.

Revelation 20:11

The great white throne reflects the purity and wisdom of the Ancient One, i.e. the one who sat on it.

The earth and the heaven fled from his presence. This removal of the first heaven and earth, foretold in: <<*For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land*>> (Haggai 2:6), and: <<*At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.'*>> This phrase 'Yet once more' indicates the removal of what is shaken

– that is, created things – so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe>> (Hebrews 12:26-28), and previewed in 6:12-14 and 16:18-21, prepares for the new heaven and earth: <<For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind>> (Isaiah 65:17), <<For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your descendants and your name remain>> (Isaiah 66:22), and: <<But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home>> (2 Peter 3:10-13). John will expand on this at the beginning of the next chapter.

No place was found for them indicates that heaven and earth no longer exist; this is the meaning of fled from his presence.

¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books.

Revelation 20:12

The dead, great and small, include both God's saints (11:18 and 19:5), and the beast's worshipers (13:16 and 19:18). All people must stand before the throne of grace, either to be rewarded or condemned.

Books recording their deeds will be opened: <<A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgement, and the books were opened>> (Daniel 7:10), providing the grounds on which each is judged: <<For he will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality>> (Romans 2:6-11). God keeps an accurate record of every human deed, and will reward and punish with perfect justice.

Another book was opened. It would appear that two or more books have been kept. The book of life records all those whom God has chosen for eternal life since before the foundation of the world. It seems that the other books keep a record of all the deeds that each individual has done, whether good or evil, and perhaps a list of all the things they should have done or said but did not. God does not need

a written record in order to remember such things, nor is there any requirement for him to have proof for his judgements, but the fact that he has chosen to keep such records does help to support the validity of his judgements.

The dead were judged according to their works. This is probably a reference to the deeds of unbelievers because those in Christ remain alive and are not dead: <<*Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'*>> (John 11:25-26). If those who are saved are intended here as well then it would be a judgement for their rewards and not a judgement for their salvation, because that is by grace alone.

¹³ And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done.

Revelation 20:13

The sea, Death and Hades, i.e. the realm of the dead (6:8), will give up their dead as all people return to bodily existence to be judged: <<*For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil*>> (2 Corinthians 5:10). They will be judged by Jesus: <<*For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done*>> (Matthew 16:27), <<*Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation*>> (John 5:28-29), and: <<*While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead*>> (Acts 17:30-31).

All were judged according to what they had done. Unbelievers will be rightly condemned for their sins: <<*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*>> (Romans 3:23). Believers, whose names are in the book of life, will enter into <<*a new heaven and a new earth*>> (21:1), because the names in that book are of those who have been redeemed by 'the Lamb who was slain' for their sins (1:5). Their recorded deeds attest to their trust in Christ and are also the basis for determining their rewards; refer to the comments made on 1 Corinthians 3:14-15, 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Revelation 22:12-16.

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

Revelation 20:14-15

Death, the last enemy, will be destroyed when Christ returns and raises believers: <<*But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to*>>

God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death>> (1 Corinthians 15:23-26). Therefore Death and Hades will be the last to be thrown into the lake of fire, the second death, where they will join the beast and the false prophet (19:20), and the devil (20:10).

Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life will be condemned for the record of their deeds and thrown into the lake of fire. Those enrolled in the Lamb's book of life enter the New Jerusalem (21:27).