

## 21. Judgment: The End of Satan and Death and Hades (Revelation 20)

Revelation 20 generates the most contentious discussion of any of the chapters in Revelation. The chapter becomes a main proof text for those proponents of a 1,000-year reign of Christ on this earth. Indeed, there is no mention in the Bible of Christ returning to the earth. 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 clearly asserts that those alive and those raised will be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, where we will be with the Lord forever:

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

The New Testament and, in fact, the entire Bible explicitly exclude an earthly and material reign of the Lord, and the text of chapter 20 does not mention a return to earth or a material kingdom on earth. Therefore, one must look to the text of chapter 20 for the meaning of the thousand years as it relates to a spiritual reign and the binding of the dragon. The thousand years covers a time period from the binding of the dragon until he is loosed for a little while (20:1, 3b). The period also covers the time from the beginning of Christ's kingdom until the end of that kingdom (20:4b). That these times are the same becomes apparent in a careful reading of the text of chapter 20.

The very nature of the use of the term, *one thousand years*, emphasizes its indefinite meaning. The term is used only two other in the Bible in the way of its use in chapter 20. The first time was by David in Psalms 90:4-6

4 For a thousand years in your sight  
are like a day that has just gone by,  
or like a watch in the night.  
5 You sweep men away in the sleep of death;  
they are like the new grass of the morning —  
6 though in the morning it springs up new,  
by evening it is dry and withered.

The *thousand years as one day* metaphor reoccurs in 2 Peter 3:7-9:

7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.  
8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Peter and John, speaking the same thing on the same subject, solidify the view that the thousand years of chapter 20 is a long but indefinite period. It is the period from the binding of Satan until his loosing and from the beginning of Christ's kingdom until its end. Both of these will receive more attention as they occur in the text.

## ***The Binding of the Dragon (Revelation 20:1-3)***

*20:1 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.*

The angel that John saw was coming down out of heaven with the key to the abyss. John had seen this angel before. He had opened the abyss in chapter 9 and allowed locusts with the power to sting like scorpions of the earth (See notes on chapter 9). Now the angel once again uses the key—this time, to bind the dragon with a great chain. The locking and sealing the abyss metaphorically restrains the dragon from deceiving the nations any more. The issue at question--when did the thousand years begin?—is answered by another question—when was the dragon bound?

From the beginning of his earthly ministry, Christ showed power over the devil—a power that eventually led to his victory over death and his sending of the Holy Spirit to aid the disciples. During his temptation by the devil, Jesus rebuked him with a command, showing that the dragon’s power was on the wane, “10 Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.” Matthew 4:10-11. Later, while speaking to Peter in Mark 8:33, Jesus commanded, “Get behind me, Satan !. . .You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Not only was Jesus able to command and rebuke the devil, but he also established power over the kingdom of the devil—evil lusts, sin, and demons. He extended this power to his disciples in Luke 10:18-20, “18 He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (See chapter 9 for a discussion of scorpions and snakes as evil lusts and sin, the weapons of the dragon.)

The devil continued to be bound after Christ ascended. The church, his kingdom, received protection during this long, but indefinite time, called here, a thousand years. John has written in his gospel in John 14:16-19, “16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” Chapter 11 has already chronicled the way the word of the apostles and prophets and later that word in the testimony of Jesus thwarted the evil and strikes terror in the hearts of those who see the witnesses. The chain that binds the devil is the word of God, written by the apostles and prophets and testified to by the saints. In Revelation 19:10, the preceding chapter, the angel told John, “I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” It is the testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy that keeps the dragon from deceiving the nations anymore. The truth is there for all to know. Not even the gates of Hades shall overcome the Lord’s church (Matthew 16:16-19).

## **The First Resurrection and Reigning with Christ (Revelation 20:4-6)**

*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.*

At the same time as the binding of the dragon by the power of a resurrected Christ, the kingdom of Christ came into existence. These two events—the binding of the devil and the beginning of the kingdom of Christ mark the beginning of the metaphoric thousand years. It is during this time that those given authority to judge sit upon the thrones. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3: “2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!” Jesus, while yet living in this world, promised his disciples in Matthew 19:28, “28 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

John next saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. John had met these souls at the opening of the seals in Revelation 6:9-11:

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

The time of their vindication is near. Previously, these notes discussed the symbolism of dying for the word of God. All Christians experience this death when they die to sin. Paul describes, in detail, the death of Christians to sin and the resurrection to a new life (called here “the first resurrection.” In Romans 6:5-11, Paul explains the first resurrection:

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

For souls to obey Christ and rise with him to walk in newness of life is the new birth spoken of by Jesus to Nicodemus John 3:3-7:

3 In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"

That they should not worship the beast nor receive the mark of the beast is critical to those raised with Christ. The import of the letters to the seven churches (See notes on chapters 2 and 3) was to keep the saints secure from Satan. Christ through John enjoined the church in Revelation 2:10, "I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." Peter warned about the ever presence of the devil in 1 Peter 5:8-9, "8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

These Christians will come to life—the first resurrection where they are raised from baptism to walk in newness of life. These same Christians will reign with Christ for the thousand years. The beginning of the thousand years started when these Christians entered the kingdom. Jesus said, while on earth, in Mark 9:1, "1 And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power." Paul showed that Christians were brought into the kingdom in Colossians 1:12-14, "12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Christ's kingdom has been on the earth from the time God first brought saints into it on the day of Pentecost after Christ's death. The thousand years and this kingdom on earth, the church, began at the same time. John has witnessed this principle repeatedly in the revelation. Two examples will suffice: Revelation 1:5-6 states, "5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father." The combination of the perfect tense verb, *has made*, (an action begun in the past and continued to the present) and the present tense infinitive, *to be* (a permanent state of being), show us in a kingdom from that first day, continuing forever. The praise of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders affirmed this very principle in Revelation 5:9-10:

You were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased men for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation.  
10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth.

How long this kingdom, now upon the earth, the church, will continue marks the end of the thousand years. Jesus taught that the exact day no one knows in Matthew 24:36-37, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man." In 2 Peter 3:8-10, Peter taught the same thing: "8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the

Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. . . . 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” Although Paul does not give a specific day for the end to come, he does give an unmistakable sequence of happenings, including the end. In 1 Corinthians 15:22-24, Paul wrote, “22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.”

Therefore, the thousand years is continuing, the Dragon is bound by the spirit of prophecy and the testimony of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit bears witness with out spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, joint-heirs with Jesus (See Romans 8:8-16-17).

The first resurrection is the resurrection from baptism into the death of Jesus that we might walk in newness of life. We are born anew, according to John’s gospel. Blessed and holy are those who have part in this first resurrection, for the second death has no power over them and they will be priests of God and of Christ and reign with him for the thousand years. Just as the kingdom and the thousand years began with those first Christians and continues to our time, so does the priesthood, which is composed of these same Christians. Peter wrote of Christians in 1 Peter 2:9-10, “9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

The second death has no power over Christians who have washed away their sins and been raised to walk in newness of life (the first resurrection). The second death has no power over them. Paul described the first death as a spiritual death in Ephesians 2:1-5:

2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.

To this first and spiritual death, Paul added the first resurrection in Colossians 3:1-4, “1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

The Revelation clearly explains the second death. In Revelation 2:11, Christians learn how to escape it, “11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.” According to Revelation 20:14-15, the lake of fire is the second death, and in Revelation 21:8, it called the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

### ***The Devil’s Doom (Revelation 20:7-10)***

*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 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.*

At the end of the thousand years is the time when Jesus will deliver the kingdom to the father. It will occur when Jesus has overcome all his adversaries. 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 records these events: "24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

Gog, the king, and Magog, the kingdom, from a prophecy of Ezekiel represent the spiritual battle between the dragon and the church. *The camp of god's people, the city he loves* is the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, the church. Nelson describes that ancient event:

The leader of a confederacy of armies that attacked the land of Israel. Described as "the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal," Gog is also depicted as being "of the land of Magog" (Ezekiel 38:2-3), a "place out of the far north" of Israel. Ezekiel prophetically describes Gog and his allies striking at Israel with a fierce and sudden invasion (Ezekiel 38-39). According to Ezekiel's prophecy, Gog will be crushed on the mountains of Israel in a slaughter so great it will take seven months to bury the dead (Ezekiel 39:12). (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

There is little if any evidence that Ezekiel's prophecy historically happened, indicating that the Israel of that prophecy was the spiritual Israel, the church, and the battle was a spiritually battle against those who wear white garments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. Therefore, this passage in Revelation 20 has the same meaning as the battle of Armageddon in Revelation 16:16, the final battle with the beast and the false prophet in Revelation 19:19-21.

Satan will go first to his doom and Death and Hades will quickly follow in verses 20:14-15. All of Satan's resources, gathered from all over the world, could not overcome the church, the camp of God's people, the city that he loves. Fire devoured the followers of Satan, and Satan, the devil, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, just like the beast and the false prophet before him. The end of Satan comes in just three verses or 113 words.

### ***The Judgment of the Dead (Revelation 20:11-15)***

*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.*

John once again sees the throne of God (See notes on 4:1-6). This time all mankind appears, the great and small. In Daniel 7:9-10, Daniel tells of a similar vision:

9 "As I looked,  
"thrones were set in place,  
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.

His clothing was as white as snow;  
the hair of his head was white like wool.  
His throne was flaming with fire,  
and its wheels were all ablaze.  
10 A river of fire was flowing,  
coming out from before him.  
Thousands upon thousands attended him;  
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.  
The court was seated,  
and the books were opened.

The dead were judged by what was written in the books. Paul had presented the nature of this judgment in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." In the letter to the church at Ephesus, the Lord had said, "5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels." Revelation 3:5. Paul referred to certain Christians as having their names written in the book of life (Philippians 4:3). David spoke of the removal of names from the book of life in Psalms 69:27-28:

27 Charge them with crime upon crime;  
do not let them share in your salvation.  
28 May they be blotted out of the book of life  
and not be listed with the righteous.

Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. Thus, came to pass the completion of the revelation as it affected the end of the good and bad. Paul had written that the last enemy was death. In 1 Corinthians 15:53-57, he wrote,

"54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

55 "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

If anyone's name was not written in the book of life, he too was thrown in the lake of fire.