

# Revelation

## Escape the Coming Wrath!

Lesson 20

Chapter 20

Saints Will Reign and Sinners Be Judged!

### 1. Read verses 1-6. **The Millennium!**

The phrase “thousand years” occurs six times in Revelation 20:1-7. This period in history is known as “the Millennium,” from two Latin words, *mille* (“thousand”) and *annum* (“year”)—the 1,000-year kingdom of Christ on earth. At last, Christ and His church will reign over the nations of the earth, and Israel will enjoy the blessings promised by the prophets (see Isa. 2:1-5; 4:1-6; 11:1-9; 112:1-6; 30:18-26; 35:1-10).

Is this a literal kingdom on earth, or should these verses be “spiritualized” and applied to the church today? Some interpreters say that the term “a thousand years” is simply a number meaning “ultimate perfection” ( $10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1,000$ ). They assert that it is a symbol of Christ’s victory and the church’s wonderful blessings now that Satan has been defeated and bound. This view is known as *amillennialism*, which means “no millennium”—that is, no literal kingdom.

The problem with this view is that it does not explain why John introduced the period with a resurrection of the dead. He was certainly not writing about a “spiritual” resurrection, because he even told how these people died! And in Revelation 20:5, John wrote of another literal resurrection. If we are now in the 1,000 year kingdom of victory, when did this resurrection take place? It seems reasonable to assume that John wrote about a literal physical resurrection of the dead, and a literal kingdom on earth.

What is the purpose of the millennial kingdom? For one thing, it will be the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel and to Christ (Ps. 2; Luke 1:30-33). Our Lord reaffirmed them to His own Apostles (Luke 22:29-30). This kingdom will be a worldwide display of Christ’s glory, when all nature will be set free from the bondage of sin (Rom. 8:19-22). It will be the answer to the prayers of the saints, “Thy kingdom come!” It will also be God’s final demonstration of the sinfulness of sin and the wickedness of the human heart apart from God’s grace...

The Tribulation martyrs will be raised from the dead and given glorious thrones and rewards. The church will share in this reign, as symbolized by the twenty-four elders (Rev. 5:10; see also 2:26-28; 3:12, 21; I Thes. 4:13-18; II Tim. 2:12). Some bible students believe that the Old Testament saints will also be a part of this “first resurrection” (Dan. 12:1-4).

The phrase “general resurrection” is not found in the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible teaches two resurrections: the first is of the saved and leads to blessing; the second is of all the lost and leads to judgment (note especially John 5:28-29; Dan. 12:2). These two resurrections will be separated by 1,000 years.

Revelation 20:6 describes the special blessings of those who share in the first resurrection. They did not earn these blessings; they are part of the believer’s

inheritance in Jesus Christ. This is the sixth of the seven “beatitudes” in Revelation; the final one is Revelation 22:7. These resurrected believers will share Christ’s glorious life, reigning as kings and priests with Him, and never experience the “second death,” the lake of fire (hell, Rev. 20:14).

During the Millennium, the inhabitants of the earth will include not only glorified saints, but also citizens of the nations who bow in submission to Jesus Christ (see Matt. 25:31-40; also 8:11). Because of the earth’s perfect conditions, people will live long lives (Isa. 65:17-25, especially v. 20). They will marry and have children who will outwardly conform to our Lord’s righteous rule. But not all of them will be truly born again as the Millennium progresses; and this explains why Satan will be able to gather a great army of rebels at the close of the Kingdom Age (Rev. 20:8).

For many centuries, man has dreamed of a “golden age,” a “utopia” in which the human race will be free from war, sickness, and even death. Men have tried to achieve this goal on their own and have failed. It is only when Jesus Christ reigns on David’s throne that the kingdom will come and the earth be delivered from the oppression of Satan and sin.<sup>78</sup>

- (a) What does John see happening in verses 1 and 2? How long will Satan be bound in the Abyss?
  
- (b) According to verse 3, what is the primary purpose for Satan being bound?
  
- (c) What will happen at the end of this 1,000 period (verses 3, 7 and 8)?

*Abussos* (abyss) appears seven times in Revelation (cf. 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8), always in reference to the temporary place of incarceration for certain demons. The abyss is not their final place of punishment; the lake of fire is (Matt. 25:41). Nevertheless it is a place of torment to which the demons fear to be sent (Luke 8:31)...They will be transferred directly from their temporary incarceration in the abyss to their permanent place of punishment, the lake of fire (cf. Isa. 24:21-22).<sup>79</sup>

- (d) Read Matthew 25:31-46. According to this passage, when Jesus returns to this earth, what will He do?

We must not confuse this judgment with the Great White Throne Judgment described in Revelation 20:11-15...This judgment takes place on earth immediately after the Battle of Armageddon. The White Throne Judgment takes place in space somewhere (“the

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<sup>78</sup> Wiersbe, 619-620.

<sup>79</sup> MacArthur, 234-235.

earth and the heaven fled away,” Rev. 20:11). The judgment here in Matthew 25 takes place before the kingdom is established on earth, for the saved are told to “inherit the kingdom (Matt. 25:34). The White Throne Judgment will take place after the 1,000-year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:7ff).<sup>80</sup>

- (e) What does John see happening in verse 4?
- (f) Read Daniel 7:27; Matthew 19:28; I Corinthians 6:2; II Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; and, 20:4. Who will reign and rule with Christ during this Millennial Kingdom?
- (g) Who does not come to life until the end of the thousand years (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29)? What will those who are raised to life at the end of the Millennium face (Revelation 20:11-15)?
- (h) What is the first resurrection? Who participates in this resurrection?
- (i) What blessings accrue to those who are part of this first resurrection?
- (j) Read I Corinthians 15:35-56. Describe this resurrection body that believers will receive one day.
- It will be **physical**. Verse 44 states, “It is raised a spiritual **body**.”
  - It will be \_\_\_\_\_. Verse 42
  - It will be \_\_\_\_\_. Verse 43
  - It will be \_\_\_\_\_. Verse 44
  - It will be like \_\_\_\_\_. Verse 49
  - It will be \_\_\_\_\_. Verse 53
  - It will be \_\_\_\_\_. Verse 53

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<sup>80</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 1* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989), 93.

2. Read verses 7-10. **Satan's Doom!**

Satan and his demon hordes will be imprisoned in the Abyss for the duration of the Millennium, in which the Lord Jesus Christ will rule with unopposed sovereignty. They will not be permitted to interfere in the affairs of the kingdom in any way. Satan's binding will end, however, when the thousand are completed and he is released from his prison to lead a final rebellion of sinners...

When Satan is loosed, he will provide the cohesive supernatural leadership needed to bring to the surface all the latent sin and rebellion left in the universe. He will pull together all the rebels, revealing the true character and intent of those Christ-rejecting sinners and making it evident that God's judgment of them is just. Satan's desperate wickedness and violent hatred of God and Christ will not be altered by his thousand years of imprisonment in the abyss. When he is released, he will immediately set about fomenting his final act of rebellion.<sup>81</sup>

- (a) This is a particularly difficult section to fully understand. As with all of Scripture, one must read the Word of God and ask for spiritual discernment by the Spirit of God. With that stated, what does John see happening in verses 7-9?

The name God appears to be used in Scripture as a general title for an enemy of God's people (the Septuagint uses it to translate "Agag" in Num. 24:7). In Ezekiel 38-39, the name God describes the final Antichrist of the Tribulation. Most likely, then, God is used in verse 8 to describe the human leader of Satan's forces. Some believe the people known as Magog to be the descendants of Noah's grandson of that same name (Gen. 10:2). They later became known as the Scythians and inhabited the region north of the Black and Caspian Seas. Whoever the historical people known as Magog may have been, the term is used in this passage to describe the sinful rebels from all the nations who will gather together for the final war in human history.<sup>82</sup>

- (b) Where is the devil headed and how long will he be there?

- (c) Read the following and give a brief description of Hell from each passage:

- **Mental torture:** Daniel 12:2; Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 25:30
- **Physical torture:** Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:43-44; Luke 16:23-24; Revelation 14:10-11
- **Eternal torture:** I Thessalonians 1:8-9; Revelation 14:10-11; 20:10

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<sup>81</sup> MacArthur, 240.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 241.

(d) How can a person avoid Hell (John 3:16)?

3. Read verses 11-15. **Man's Last Day in Court!**

This passage describes the final sentencing of the lost and is the most serious, sobering, and tragic passage in the entire Bible. Commonly known as the Great White Throne judgment, it is the last courtroom scene that will ever take place. After this there will never again be a trial, and God will never again need to act as judge. The accused, all the unsaved who have ever lived, will be resurrected to experience a trial like no other that has ever been. There will be no debate over their guilt or innocence. There will be a prosecutor, but no defender; an accuser, but no advocate. There will be an indictment, but no defense mounted by the accused; the conviction evidence will be presented with no rebuttal or cross-examination. There will be an utterly unsympathetic Judge and no jury, and there will be no appeal of the sentence He pronounces. The guilty will be punished eternally with no possibility of parole in a prison from which there is no escape.

The language of this passage is plain, stark, and unembellished. Few details are given, and the description is utterly lacking in the vivid, eloquent modifiers that might be expected. But the scene is frightening enough in its own right that such language would be superfluous. The beloved apostle John, recording this vision in a cave or on a hillside on the island of Patmos, no doubt was shaken as he wrote of the eternal damnation of the wicked.

Ever since the Fall, Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44), has attempted to deceive people about the reality of the coming judgment. He has done his best to convince people that there will be no final tribunal. Satan has deceived sinners into believing that they can live as they please without fear of ultimate accountability or future punishment. Satan said to Eve, "You surely will not die!" (Gen. 3:4), thus voicing his denial of judgment on sin. The primary means the devil uses in his deception are atheism (particularly the godless theory of evolution) and false religion. Atheism's denial of God's existence means there is no moral Judge to whom people are accountable after they die. They wrongly believe that they are free to sin as they please and then simply pass out of existence. The gods of most false religions are not holy, requiring inward righteousness and heart obedience, and they are appeased by ritual and ceremony; thus these gods inspire no fear of accountability in their worshippers.

But despite the vain, foolish speculations of men, the true and living God is the Supreme Judge of the universe. His judgment of unbelievers will be just, because He is just. Deuteronomy 32:4 says of God, "His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He." Job 37:23-24 declares, "The Almighty—we cannot find Him; He is exalted in power and He will not do violence to justice and abundant righteousness. Therefore men fear Him." God cannot but be just, because the absolutely holy perfection of His nature will not allow Him to do anything but what is right! God's will is the supreme standard of justice and equity, and He wills nothing but what is just, right, and true. Nothing outside of Himself compels God to act justly; justice is His very nature. Thus, all of God's acts toward people are perfectly just; sinners have all wronged God's justice, but God's justice has not wronged them nor could it ever.

No one at the Great White Throne judgment will have the slightest grounds for complaint about his or her sentence. Those who reject God's grace and mercy in this life will inevitably face His justice in the life to come. God said to wayward Israel, "My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me" (Ps. 81:11). To their equally stiff-necked descendants Jesus declared, "You are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life" (John 5:40) and "You will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). Unrepentant sinners will experience God's justice at the Great White Throne judgment.<sup>83</sup>

- (a) What does John now see in verses 11 and 12?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (b) Read Psalm 9:7-8 and Daniel 7:9-10. Who is seated upon this throne and what will he be doing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (c) Read Acts 10:42; 17:31; Romans 2:16; and II Timothy 4:1. Who will judge the world?

There shall be a second resurrection, and the unsaved will be raised and will stand before God's judgment. Do not confuse this judgment at the White Throne with the Judgment Seat of Christ, where believers will have their works judged and rewarded. At this judgment, there will be only unbelievers; and there will be no rewards. John described here an awesome scene. Heaven and earth will flee away and no place will be left for sinners to hide! All must face the Judge!<sup>84</sup>

- (d) Who will stand before this judgment throne?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (e) Read John 3:18; 5:24 and Romans 8:1. How can a person avoid this horrible judgment?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (f) According to what will the "dead" be judged?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (g) From where do the "dead" come?

The sea may be singled out because it is seemingly the most difficult place from which bodies could be resurrected. But God will summon from its depths new bodies for all

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 245-247.

<sup>84</sup> Wiersbe, vol. 2, 620.

who perished in the sea throughout human history, including those who drowned in the Flood, those who went down with the *Titanic*, the *Lusitania*, the *Arizona*, and the countless other ships that have sunk, as well as all the millions of other people who met their end at sea. Death symbolizes all the places on land from which God will resurrect new bodies for the unrighteous dead. The sea and death are pictured as voracious monsters that have swallowed those bodies and will be forced to disgorge them ...

Hades is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *sheol*. Both words describe the realm of the dead. *Sheol*, used sixty-seven times in the Old Testament, describes the realm of the dead in general. Hades is used ten times in the New Testament, always in reference to the place of punishment (cf. Luke 16:23) where the unrighteous dead are kept pending their sentencing to hell. In this incredible scene, Hades is emptied of its captive spirits, who are reunited with resurrection bodies before the bar of God's justice. Unbelievers, fitted with resurrection bodies suited for hell, will then be ready for their sentencing to the lake of fire where their punishment, unlike that in Hades, will last forever.<sup>85</sup>

- (h) What information do you think will be contained in the books that will be opened (Psalm 44:21; Matthew 12:36-37; Luke 8:17; Romans 2:16; Revelation 2:23)?
  
- (i) What is the book of life (Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; and 21:27)?
  
- (j) What is the eternal sentence for those whose names are not found written in the book of life?

The clearest and most vivid of the New Testament terms used to describe the final hell, the lake of fire, is *genna* (Gehenna). Gehenna is the New Testament word for the valley of Ben-Hinnom (also called Topeth; II Kings 23:10; Isa. 30:33; Jer. &:31-32; 19:6), located southwest of Jerusalem. In Old Testament times, idolatrous Israelites burned their children in the fire there as sacrifices to false gods (Jer. 19:2-6). In Jesus' day, it was the site of Jerusalem's garbage dump. The fires kept constantly burning there gave off foul-smelling smoke, and the dump was infested with maggots. Sometimes the bodies of criminals were dumped there. The valley of Ben-Hinnom was thus, and apt picture of eternal hell, one used repeatedly by Jesus (Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5). Hell will be God's eternal cosmic dump...<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> MacArthur, 251-252.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 255-256.