

Revelation Chapter 20

Speaker Notes

John has just described for us the military battle (slaughter, really) that we know as Armageddon, in which Satan, the Antichrist, the False Prophet, the 10 Kings, and their armies are defeated by the word of God. The current chapter takes up immediately after that slaughter. Consider this: since Satan is an angelic being, he cannot be killed. Therefore, he is bound with manacles and thrown into the abyss for 1,000 years. At the end of the 1,000 years, he will be released, and he will once again stir-up rebellion against our God (some people just don't learn, do they?)

Here in the book of Revelation, we are told almost nothing about the Millennium. In order to learn any of the details of that period we have to look to the writings of the prophets of Israel (we will look at these later.) The Millennium is followed immediately by the judgment of the lost, commonly referred to as the Great White Throne Judgment. After the Great White Throne, God will create the new heavens and the new earth. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's see what the current chapter of Revelation has to teach us.

Revelation 20:1, 2

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And 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. In the Old Testament, Jesus (pre-incarnate) is sometimes referred to as "the angel of God." However, in the New Testament, He is never referred to as an angel, so this angel is not Jesus. And, since he is unidentified, it is best to consider him simply one of God's angels.

"Then" – Some translations have this as "And." This is from the Greek word *kai*, connecting this event with the previous events described in chapter nineteen. It is not an indication of sequence, although this event obviously follows immediately after Armageddon.

"bottomless pit" – Greek *abussos*, meaning "an extremely deep place" from which we get our English word "abyss." If you've gone through our study on Hell, you may remember that the abyss, or "the great gulf" is the area between Paradise, where Lazarus was by Abraham's side, and the place of torments where the rich man was tormented by the flames. This great gulf is also referred to as Tartarus, where God imprisoned the angels who sinned (see **2 Peter 2:4** quoted below.) In Greek mythology, Tartarus is the place where demons and extremely bad people are imprisoned.

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

"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.

"the devil" – Greek *diabolos*, which is from the verb *diaballō* which means "to accuse." Therefore, *diabolos* means "an accuser." You may recall back in chapter 12, when Satan is cast out of heaven we were told:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. (Revelation 12:10)

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

Putting this altogether, we learn that this verse literally reads:

He grabbed the dragon, the old serpent, who is an accuser and the adversary, and bound him a thousand years.

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)

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. (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 prophetic scripture is interpreted. Following is a brief description of these three viewpoints.

Postmillennialism – This is based on a non-literal, symbolic interpretation of prophesy (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, 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. However, 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 most of its proponents.

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 prophesy 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 are 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. Notice this: not only do amillennialists not deny a Millennium, they believe we are in it now.

Premillennialism – This view 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, when the amillennialist view became popular.

Revelation 20:3

and 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.

“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*, indicates that the seal is placed over the location in order to keep it secret and secure.

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

Then 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 those who were sitting on them as well as 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

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed 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, which is 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. (*Daniel 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

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and 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. And 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 are 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.

So, why does John make a reference to Gog and Magog? In Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39, the multi-national army is gathered together with one purpose in mind, to wipe Israel off the face of the earth. The armies come to the land of Israel, more specifically to Jerusalem. It truly is a battle against the God of the Jews. The battle described in this chapter of Revelation is also an attack from a multi-national army gathered together with the intent of destroying Israel and their God.

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

Revelation 20: 10

and 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

Then 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 by one of the fundamental laws of physics, all like charges 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 all the elements which make up the heavens and earth are “let loose” by God they will be “let loose” with great heat!

Revelation 20:12

And 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 all have 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 if they all have passed from death unto life then they cannot be among the dead ones in **Revelation 20:12**.

Those who stand before the Great White Throne will be judged based on their works, which are written in the books. Even though the “books” and “the Book of Life” are mentioned as being separate, 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. Another way to think of this is the fact that they are judged “according to what they had done.” Since the book of life does not contain any record of deeds, only a record of who has eternal life, then those who stand before the Great White Throne will be judged “only” by those things written in the books.

Revelation 20:13

And 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

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And 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 perhaps not all those who are judged at the Great White Throne Judgment 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.” Therefore, 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!**

What will the Millennium be like?

The only details that we have regarding what the Millennium will be like are revealed in the prophets. Here are a number of the prophetic utterances regarding the Millennium:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isaiah 2:2-4)

This is almost word-for-word the same as Micah 4:1-3, so we will not quote the Micah passage here.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)

I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my

chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the LORD. (Isaiah 65:19-25)

On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. And the LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day the LORD will be one and his name one. The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft on its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. And it shall be inhabited, for there shall never again be a decree of utter destruction. Jerusalem shall dwell in security. (Zechariah 14:8-11)

Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. And if the family of Egypt does not go up and present themselves, then on them there shall be no rain; there shall be the plague with which the LORD afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the Feast of Booths. And on that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the LORD." And the pots in the house of the LORD shall be as the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day. (Zechariah 14:16-21)

For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering. "On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD, those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue. For they shall graze and lie down, and none shall make them afraid. (Zephaniah 3:9-13)

So What?

We just got a picture of what life will be like during the Millennium. It will be a time of peace and safety (at least until Satan is released). The whole earth will be relatively flat, thanks to the massive earthquake of the seventh bowl judgment. Human lives will be long, just like they were before the flood. A person who dies at the age of 100 years old will be considered a young person. God will settle disputes and He will do it righteously. Everyone on earth will be required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem every year for the feast of booths. Anyone who fails to do so will suffer a lack of rain for their crops. That will be especially bad given that it appears that the whole world will be an agrarian society

Will Christians be here on earth during the Millennium? I think we can answer this by quoting again a passage that we quoted in our study of the previous chapter. It's actually a passage about

the rapture of the church, but it gives us the insight that we need to answer the question of whether or not we will be on the earth during the Millennium.’

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. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)

According to Paul in this first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, when we are raptured from this earth, we will meet the Lord in the air and from that moment on, “we will always be with the Lord.” from that point in time, wherever Jesus is, you and I will be with Him!

This may seem a little bit out of left field, but ... Let’s also look at one of the most famous Christmas passages. Isaiah the Prophet said:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Jesus will rule (govern) during the Millennium. We have proof of this in the very chapter of Revelation that we are studying today. Back in verse 4 we learned about the tribulation martyrs:

They (the tribulation martyrs) came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4)

The tribulation martyrs will come to life physically, not just spiritually. They will be physically reigning with Christ on the earth. And, since Jesus is alive physically and reigning on the earth, then we (who will always be with the Lord) will also be alive and physically reigning on the earth with Him during the Millennium.

Consider how blessed this will be. We will experience the Millennial reign with Christ! But – after the Millennium, God will create the new heavens and the new earth, including the New Jerusalem, where we will live for eternity.

Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Let’s pray.

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