

Revelation 20 – The Millennium

Revelation 20:1 “*And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.*”

I saw - The events described in chapter 20 follow immediately upon those portrayed in chapter 19.

Come down - Literally “coming down.” John saw the angel descending to Earth.

Key - No doubt symbolic of being able to imprison or confine. The fact that an angel carries the key shows that he has complete control of events. The dragon will be unable to avoid being cast into the pit.

Bottomless pit - Greek *abussos*. (Revelation 9:1) This is a symbolic vision. So the bottomless pit is not some subterranean cavern or some yawning chasm elsewhere in the universe. John is describing the prophetic picture that unfolded before his eyes. In vision he saw an actual pit, but the shutting up of the dragon in the pit was merely a symbolic way of showing that Satan's activities would be brought to a halt. This is made clear by the statement showing the purpose of his confinement; “that he should deceive the nations no more.” (Revelation 20:3)

How Satan's activities will be brought to a halt is clear from the context and other scriptures, which show that the earth will be utterly depopulated at the second coming of Christ. According to Revelation 19:19-21 the wicked are destroyed in connection with the coming. At the same time the righteous are “*caught up ... in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.*” (1 Thessalonians 4:17) Paul's language shows that at His second coming Christ does not establish His kingdom on earth. Else why would He remove the saints from the earth? Its establishment takes place after the close of the millennium when the New Jerusalem comes down. (Revelation 21:1-3) That Jesus removes the saints from the earth at His coming is further implied in John 14:1-3. In comforting His disciples in their sorrow concerning His departure, Jesus informed them that He was going to His Father's house, where He would prepare dwellings for them. Then He would return and take them to be with Him. Compare John 13:36; 17:24. The dwellings are no doubt in the New Jerusalem, which is not transferred to this earth until the close of the millennium. (Revelation 21:1-3)

The group that is caught up to meet the Lord in the air includes both the righteous dead who are raised at the time of the second coming and the righteous living who are “changed.” (1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) The company of resurrected saints thus includes all the righteous who have ever lived upon the earth. There are two resurrections. The “resurrection of life” and the “resurrection of damnation.” (John 5:29; Acts 24:15) At these resurrections, “all that are in the grave ... shall come forth.” (John 5:28-29) Some have insisted that the phrase “dead in Christ” (1 Thessalonians 4:16) includes only the Christians who have died and that the Old Testament saints are not

included. But the above scriptures show that all the righteous come forth in the resurrection of the just. The phrase “dead in Christ” need not exclude the Old Testament saints for they died with their hope fixed on a Messiah to come. Their resurrection is dependent upon the resurrection of Christ, for only “in Christ shall all be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:22) The resurrection of the righteous is further described as the “first resurrection.” (Revelation 20:5-6)

Much confusion has been brought into the millennial doctrine by those who fail to recognize that many promises to ancient Israel were conditional to obedience. Many fanciful theories are advanced by those who attempt to fit a fulfillment of these ancient promises into the eschatological picture of the NT. This is more than the New Testament writers attempt. Inspired by the Spirit of God they present a consistent picture of last day events. They show how events might have met a different fulfillment had the Jewish nation accepted their divine destiny and will be fulfilled with respect to the New Testament church. They show the true position of the Jew in New Testament times and accord no special place to the Jews as a nation. In one of His parables Jesus clearly revealed that when the Jewish nation rejected Christ, “the kingdom of God” was taken from them “and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Matthew 21:43) The Jew now stands in the same relationship to God as the Gentile. (Romans 11) A careful survey of all the evidence shows that the Jews as a nation play no special role in millennial events. As individuals, those who through the centuries of the Christian Era have accepted Jesus Christ are saved as members of the Christian church. Along with other saints they rise in the first resurrection and are translated. Those who persist in their rejection of the Messiah rise in the second resurrection. (Revelation 20:5)

The removal of all the saints to heaven and the destruction of all the living wicked (see above) leave the earth totally depopulated. Furthermore, the fearful convulsions of nature connected with the seven last plagues (Revelation 16:18-21) leave the earth a scene of utter desolation. Dead bodies lie strewn over its surface. (Revelation 19:17-21) It is not unreasonable to see in the *abussos*, a symbol of the desolated earth to which Satan will be confined during the millennium. In the LXX of Genesis 1:2 *abussos* translates the Hebrew *tehom* - “deep,” the word that describes the surface of the earth as it appeared on the first day of creation, “without form, and void.”

Chain - A symbol of restraint. No binding with a literal chain is prefigured here.

In his hand - Or “upon his hand.” Perhaps indicating that the chain was hanging from the angel's hand.

Revelation 20:2 “*And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,*”

Laid hold - Greek *krateo* - Meaning “to seize,” “to hold fast.”

Satan - This refers back to Revelation 12:9 where the same list of names appears.

Bound - The binding of the dragon is symbolic of the restrictions placed upon Satan's activities. The wicked will have been slain at the second coming of Christ. The righteous will have been transported to heaven. Satan and his evil angels will be confined to the desolated earth. So there will be not even one member of the human race left alive on earth whom Satan can exercise his deceptive powers. It is in this that his binding will consist. (verse 1)

Thousand years - Some commentators take this to be prophetic time being 360,000 literal years. They base their interpretation on the fact that these verses are symbolic and that therefore the time period must be symbolically interpreted. Others point out that this prophecy contains a mixture of literal elements and that therefore it is not necessary to understand the expression symbolically. This commentary takes the position that the thousand years are literal.

Bible chronologists place us in the last generation of 6000 years. If Jesus were to return at the end of 6000 years then we would have a millennial Sabbath. This would be consistent with 2 Peter 3:8, “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Six days work and the seventh day rest. This Earth's history may become a mirror image of the creation week but with a thousand years to a day. This would also support a literal thousand years and is most probable.

Revelation 20:3 “*And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.*”

Bottomless pit - verse 1.

Set a seal - Greek *sphragizo* - Meaning “to seal.” For the function of ancient seals, Revelation 7:2. The present seal may be compared with that placed on the tomb of Jesus. (Matthew 27:66) The sealing symbolizes that Satan will be effectively restrained for the period indicated.

Deceive the nations - Satan's work of deception will be cut short by the depopulation of the earth. There will be no one whom he can deceive. (verse 1)

Must - Greek *dei* - Meaning “it is necessary.” *Dei* suggests necessity based upon moral and ethical reasons. Here it is a necessity because God wills that it shall be so as a part of His divine plan.

Loosed - This represents the reverse of the binding of the devil at the second coming of Christ. Satan is once again in the position to deceive men and work his will in opposition to God. It was the depopulation of the earth that terminated his deceptive work. His loosing will therefore be accomplished by a repopulation of the earth. An event brought about by the resurrection of the wicked at the close of the thousand years. (

verse 5) These newly resurrected ones will be subject to his deceptions as he plans his final test of strength with Jehovah.

A little season - Or “a little time.” How long this “little” time will be we are not informed. It will be time enough for Satan to organize the resurrected wicked for an assault upon the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 20:4 “*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*”

Thrones - Symbols of authority to exercise rule as a king (Revelation 13:2) or as a judge. (Matthew 19:28)

Sat - Or “took their seats.”

Judgment - Greek *krima* - Meaning “sentence,” “verdict,” “a decision rendered.” Here *krima* seems to mean the authority to pass sentence. The passage does not refer to a verdict in favor of the righteous. The saints sit upon thrones, which indicates that they are the ones who will pronounce sentence. The passage is no doubt an allusion to Daniel 7:22 where the prophet notes that “judgment was given to the saints of the most High.” For “judgment” the LXX of Daniel reads *krisis*, “the act of judging,” whereas Theodotion's Greek version reads *krima*.

The work of judgment referred to by the revelator is no doubt that spoken of by Paul: “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? ... Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” (1 Corinthians 6:2-3) The work of judgment will no doubt involve a careful investigation of the records of evil men so that every man will be convinced of the justice of God in the destruction of the wicked.

Souls - Revelation 6:9; cf. Psalms 16:10.

Beheaded - Greek *pelekizo* - Meaning literally “to cut off with an ax,” specifically, “to behead.” The word comes from *pelekus* - “an ax.” The ax was the usual instrument used in executions in ancient Rome. Later it was replaced by the sword.

Witness of Jesus - Or “testimony of Jesus.” The witness borne about Jesus. (Revelation 1:2, 9)

Word of God - Revelation 1:2, 9.

Which had not worshipped - In other words they heeded the warning of the third angel (Revelation 14:9-12) and refused to bow to the power represented by the beast

even though threatened with boycott and death. (Revelation 13:15-17) Only two classes of saints are mentioned in this verse. Martyrs and victors over the beast. This does not mean that they are the only ones to share in the millennial reign, for it has been shown that all the righteous dead (not only the martyrs) come forth in the first resurrection. (Revelation 20:1; cf. Daniel 12:2) Perhaps the martyrs and the victors over the beast are singled out because they represent those who have suffered most.

Lived - The Greek may be translated either “lived” or “came to life.” The context seems to favor the latter translation. Otherwise the declaration, “This is the first resurrection” (verse 5) is without proper antecedent. However, the victors over the beast are alive in the time immediately preceding the coming of the Son of man and the majority if not all will require no resurrection. (verse 1)

Reigned - The question is raised over whom will the saints reign if all the wicked have been destroyed? They are said to reign “with Christ.” When the seventh angel sounds, “the kingdoms of this world ... become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ.” (Revelation 11:15) Daniel speaks of the “kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom” being “given to the people of the saints of the most High.” (Revelation 7:27) The saints have been under the oppressive rule of kings who had drunk of the wine of Babylon's fornication. (Revelation 18:3) Now the tables have been turned.

Yes the wicked are dead, (Revelation 20:2) but they will return to life at the end of the millennial period. (verse 5) They are shut up as it were, to later receive their punishment. In the meantime the saints assist in the work of judgment that determines the punishment to be meted out. After the wicked return to life they go down in utter defeat, receive their punishment and are destroyed. (Revelation 14:10; 20:9)

With Christ - The millennial reign is with Christ in heaven, not on earth as many Bible interpreters assert. (verse 2)

Thousand years - verse 2.

Revelation 20:5 *“But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.”*

Rest of the dead - This obviously refers to the wicked dead, those who from the beginning of time have gone into Christless graves and those who have perished at the second coming of Christ. This is clear from the fact that all the righteous dead arose in the first resurrection. Therefore “the rest of the dead” must refer to the wicked dead. (verse 2)

Textual evidence may be cited for the omission of the sentence, “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished,” though it is generally held that the preponderance of evidence is in favor of retaining it. The doctrine of the second resurrection is not however dependent upon this statement. It is clearly implied in the

chapter. If the nations are to join Satan in his assault upon the Holy City, (verse 9) they must be brought back to life. The term “second resurrection” is derived from the observation that there are only two main resurrections (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15) and that the resurrection of the righteous is called the “first resurrection.” (Revelation 20:2, 4)

The passage, “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished” is parenthetical. The sentence that follows, “This is the first resurrection” is connected directly with the resurrection referred to in verse 4.

Lived not - Rather “came not to life.” (verse 4)

Were finished - The phrase may literally be translated, “until shall have been completed.”

First resurrection - The one mentioned in verse 4.

Revelation 20:6 “*Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*”

Blessed - Greek *makarios*. (Matthew 5:3)

Holy - Greek *hagios*. (Romans 1:7)

Second death - This is the death that comes to the wicked after their resurrection at the close of the [1000 years](#). (verse 14; Revelation 21:8) The first death is the death that comes to all. (1 Corinthians 15:22; Hebrews 9:27) All of the righteous and the wicked are raised from this death. (John 5:28, 29) The righteous come forth from their graves immortal. (1 Corinthians 15:52-55) The wicked are raised to receive their punishment and to die an eternal death. (Revelation 20:9; 21:8) God destroys them both body and soul in hell. (Matthew 10:28) This means annihilation. The “second death” is the exact opposite of an endless life under torture, which some teach will be the fate of the wicked. (Matthew 25:41)

Power - Greek *exousia* - Meaning “authority.” The second death will not touch the redeemed.

Priests - Revelation 1:6; cf. Isaiah 61:6.

Of God - In company with God. In the same way “of Christ” means in company with Christ. Or the expressions “of God” and “of Christ” may signify respective serving God and serving Christ.

Reign - verse 4.

Revelation 20:7 “*And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,*”

Loosed - The confinement resulted from the removal of the righteous to heaven and the slaying of the living wicked. (verse 2) The loosing will be accomplished by the resurrection of the wicked, which will provide Satan with subjects upon whom to practice his deceptive guile.

Prison - The prison is the “bottomless pit,” the earth desolated at the second coming of Christ where Satan had been confined during the 1000 years. (verse 1) Satan is to be free to organize the resurrected wicked. This will be his final attempt against God before his destruction.

Revelation 20:8 “*And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*”

Gog and Magog - These terms represent the hosts of the unsaved of all ages who come forth in the second resurrection. For a discussion of the names “Gog” and “Magog” and the application of these symbols in Old Testament prophecy and in the present passage, see Ezekiel 38:1-2.

To battle - Textual evidence favors the reading “for the battle.” The definite article lays stress on a particular battle, the last conflict between God and those in rebellion against Him.

Sand of the sea - Beyond computation. (cf. Genesis 22:17) This is composed of all the unsaved from the foundation of the world.

Revelation 20:9 “*And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.*”

Breadth of the earth - Compare a similar expression in Habakkuk 1:6. The wicked under the leadership of Satan march against the camp of the righteous.

Compassed - That is, “encircled.”

Camp - Greek *parembole* - Meaning “camp,” a compound of para, “beside,” and ballo, “to put,” “to place,” “to cast.” *Parembole* is used of a soldiers' barracks or fort, (Acts 21:34, 37) of armies in battle array, (Hebrews 11:34) of an encampment of people. (Hebrews 13:11, 13) Here *parembole* describes the New Jerusalem.

And the beloved city - Or “even the beloved city.” The beloved city is the New Jerusalem. (Revelation 21:10) Some scholars distinguish between the camp and the city.

This much seems clear however, that the saints are inside the city during the siege. The fact that the “beloved city” is being surrounded shows clearly that it has descended although the actual descent is not described until Revelation 21:1, 9-10. One of the significant events following the close of the 1000 years is the descent of Christ, the saints and the Holy City. The narrative is told with extreme brevity, but the sequence of events is clear when the entire context is examined.

Fire - This no doubt refers to literal fire as the means of destruction.

Devoured - Literally “ate down.” The form of the Greek verb denotes action completed. The wicked are annihilated. They suffer the “second death.” (verse 6) There is no hint here of endless torture in an ever-burning [hell fire](#) (cf. Jude 7)

Revelation 20:10 *“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”*

Lake of fire - Revelation 19:20. Here the lake of fire is the surface of the earth turned into a sea of flames, which both consumes the wicked and purifies the earth.

Are - This word is supplied. The context suggests supplying the words “were cast.” Revelation 19:20.

Shall be tormented - The Greek verb is in the plural. The subject of the verb is the devil, the beast and the false prophet. It should be noted that the beast and the false prophet are not literal but symbolic creatures.

For ever and ever - Greek *aion* - Meaning literally “unto the ages of the ages.” “An unbroken age,” “perpetuity of time,” “eternity,” “period of time,” “age.” (Revelation 14:11)

Revelation 20:11 *“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.”*

Throne - A symbol of authority. In this case authority to carry out a judgment. The throne is “white” suggesting probably the purity and justness of the decisions arrived at. It is also described as “great,” perhaps with reference to the momentous decisions arrived at.

Him that sat - The identity of the person seated on the throne is not stated unless the phrase “before God” (verse 12) gives his identity. However, textual evidence attests the reading “before the throne” in place of “before God.” Hence the identity remains uncertain.

The Scriptures present both Christ (Romans 14:10) and the Father (Hebrews 12:23) as sitting in judgment. In Revelation 4:2, 8-9; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4 and 21:5 it is

the Father who is seated on the throne as the divine judge. The two work in closest unity. (John 10:30) The official acts of one become the official acts of the other. Here it is no doubt Christ who leads out.

Fled away - An indication of the absolute power of the One sitting upon the throne and of the transitory existence of this present world. (Psalms 102:25-26; 104:29-30; Isaiah 51:6; Mark 13:31; 2 Peter 3:10) The eternal order of things is to be of an entirely new kind. (Revelation 21:1-5)

Revelation 20:12 *“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.”*

The dead - This obviously refers to those raised in the second resurrection. (verses 5 and 7)

Small and great - Station in life has no weight in this meeting with God. Many of high position in the world escaped, while alive, the fitting reward for their evil deeds. In this final accounting with God there will be no evasion of full justice.

Before God - Textual evidence attests the reading “before the throne.” (verse 11)

The books - Literally “books.” The Greek has no definite article. These are the books containing the record of the lives of men. No sentence passed upon any wicked person will be arbitrary, biased or unfair. For a classification of these books see Daniel 7:10.

Another book - “One more book.”

Book of life - See Philippians 4:3; cf. Luke 10:20.

According to their works - See Romans 2:6. The evidence that stands open for all to see and evaluate.

Revelation 20:13 *“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”*

Sea, death, hell - These words set forth the universality of the second resurrection implied in verse 12. No man can avoid appearing in person before God on His throne. Death and hell are found together in Revelation 1:18; 6:8. For a definition of “hell,” see Matthew 11:23.

Revelation 20:14 *“And death and hell [hades] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”*

Death and hell - Death and hell [hades, grave] Their being cast into the lake of fire represents an end of death and the grave. Never will they have part in the new earth. They are mortal phenomena that belong only to this world. Death is the final enemy to be destroyed. (1 Corinthians 15:26, 53-55)

Lake of fire - verse 10.

Second death - verse 6.

Revelation 20:15 “*And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*”

Whosoever - Only the names of the faithful will be retained in the book of life. The names of those who do not endure until the end will be blotted out. (Revelation 3:5) Many never had their names recorded there for the book contains only the names of those who at some time in their lives professed faith in Christ. (Luke 10:20)

Lake of fire - verse 10. Compare Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 21:8.