

Revelation 20: Judgment: The End of Satan, Death, and Hades

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 ever 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 they will **be with the Lord forever**:

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; 17 then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

When the Day of the Lord comes, the earth will end in a destruction that is complete down to the very elements. Therefore, there will be no earth for an earthly kingdom, as Peter wrote explicitly in 2 Peter 3:10:

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

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 of Christ 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 times in the Bible, and in both times, it is used in the same figurative way that it is used in chapter 20. The first time was by David in Psalms 90:4-6:

4 For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. 5 You carry them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which grows up. 6 In the morning it flourishes, and grows up; in the evening it is cut down, and withers.

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

7 but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness;

but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should 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)

Revelation 20:1-3

20 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. 2 And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and cast him into the abyss, and shut (it), and sealed (it) over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time.

The angel that John saw coming down out of heaven with the key to the abyss, he had seen before. The angel had opened the abyss in chapter 9 and allowed locusts, with the power to sting like scorpions to plague the earth (See notes on chapter 9). Now an 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, in Matthew 4:10-11:

10 Then said Jesus unto him, "Get you hence, Satan: for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"

11 Then the devil left him; and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Later, while speaking to Peter in Mark 8:33, Jesus commanded:

33 But he turning about, and seeing his disciples, rebuked Peter, and said, "Get you behind me, Satan; for you mind not 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 And he said unto them, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall in any wise hurt you. 20 Nevertheless in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto 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 14:16-18:

16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, 17 (even) the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive; for it beholds him

not, neither knows him: you know him; for he abides with you, and shall be in you. 18 I will not leave you desolate: I come unto 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, John attempts to worship the angel:

10 And I fell down before his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, “See you do it not: I am a fellow-servant with you and with your brethren that hold **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, which 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 armed with the truth of prophecy (Matthew 16:16-19).

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

Revelation 20:4-6

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and (I saw) the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years.5 The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished. This is the first resurrection.

6 Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: over these the second death has no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him 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 preached first on the Day of Pentecost in Act 2. 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 Or know you not that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Know you not that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

Jesus, while yet living in this world, promised his disciples in Matthew 19:28:

28 And Jesus said unto them, “Truly I say unto you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon 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 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 and they cried with a great voice, saying, “How long, O Master, the holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” 11 And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled (their course).

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 For if we have become united with (him) in the likeness of his death, we shall be also (in the likeness) of his resurrection; 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with (him), that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; 7 for he that has died is justified from sin. 8 But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; 9 knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dies no more; death no more has dominion over him. 10 For the death that he died, he died unto sin once: but the life that he lives, he lives unto God. 11 Even so reckon you also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto 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 Jesus answered and said unto him, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4 Nicodemus said unto him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?”

5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say unto you, except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!”

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto you, ‘you must be born anew.’”

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,

Fear not the things which you are about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days. Be you faithful unto 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 sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour, 9 whom withstand steadfast in your faith, knowing that the same sufferings are accomplished in your brethren who are in the world.

These Christians will come to life—the first resurrection is when 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 the first Christians entered the kingdom. Jesus said, while on earth, in Mark 9:1:

9 And he said unto them, “Truly I say unto you, ‘There are some here of them that stand (by), who shall in no wise taste of death, until 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 unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; 13 who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; 14 in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins:

Christ's kingdom with priests and kings 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 of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loves us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood; 6 and he made us (to be) a kingdom, (to be) priests unto his God and Father; to him (be) the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The combination of the perfect tense verb, *has made*, (an action begun in the past and continued to the present. The present tense infinitive, *to be* is added by the translators in versions after the KJV. The praise of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders affirmed this very principle in Revelation 5:9-10:

9 And they sing a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for you were slain, and did purchase unto God with your blood (men) of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, 10 and made them (to be) unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon earth."

Since *to be* in these verses were added by the translators, which when left out makes the present existence of the kingdom, then and now, impossible to misunderstand. Only false teachers look for a kingdom yet to come.

How long this kingdom, now upon the earth, the church, will continue marks the end of the thousand years when the Lord returns. Jesus taught that the exact day of his return no one knows in Matthew 24:36-37;

36 But of that day and hour knows no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only. 37 And as (were) the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man.

In 2 Peter 3:8, 10, Peter taught the same indefinite time when the day of the Lord comes:

8 But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. . . 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

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, he wrote:

22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming. 24 Then (comes) the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all 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 writing in verse 20:

6 Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: over these the second death has no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a 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 elect race, a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for (God's) own possession, that you may show forth the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: 10 who in time past were no people, but now are the people of God: who had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained 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). Yes, the second death has no power over them. Paul described the first death as a spiritual death in Ephesians 2:1-5:

2 And you (did he make alive,) when you were dead through your trespasses and sins, 2 wherein you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience; 3 among whom we also all once lived in the lust of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest: 4 but God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have you been saved)

To this first and spiritual death, Paul added the first resurrection in Colossians 3:1-4:

If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, (who is) our life, shall be manifested, then shall you also with him be manifested in glory.

The Revelation clearly explains the second death. In Revelation 2:11, Christians learn how to escape it,

11 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death.

In Revelation 21:8, the groups of all those who will so die a second death is revealed along with there fate:

8 But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part (shall be) in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.

The Devil's Doom (Revelation 20:7-10)

Revelation 20:7-12

7 And when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, 8 and shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. 9 And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down out of heaven, and devoured them. 10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall 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 which will occur when Jesus has overcome all his adversaries. Again, 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 records these events:

24 Then (comes) the end, when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he must reign, until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that shall be abolished 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 against the saints in Revelation 19:19-21:

19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat upon the horse, and against his army. 20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight, wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast and them that worshipped his image: they two were cast alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone: 21 and the rest were killed with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, (even the sword) which came forth out of his mouth: and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

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

Revelation 20:11-15

11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is (the book) of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13 And the sea gave up the dead that were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, (even) the lake of fire. 15 And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast 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 I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit: his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, (and) the wheels thereof burning fire. 10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousands of thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, 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 be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things (done) in the body, according to what he has done, whether (it be) good or bad.

In the letter to the church at Ephesus, the Lord had said in Revelation 3:5:

5 He that overcomes shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

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 Add iniquity unto their iniquity; and let them not come into thy righteousness. 28 Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written 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 God's mystery 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 But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?

56 The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law:

57 but thanks be to God, who 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. The righteous inherit the blessings of Revelation 21 and 22, giving them victory through the Lord Jesus Christ where the second death has no power.