

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 20

Pastor Paul Cannings, D.Phil.

A. Chapter Introduction:

We have a lot to sort out, and this chapter begins to pull it all together. We have believers who died during the Old Testament times, those who died during the church age, those who will be raptured, those who were saved during the Tribulation period and were martyred, and those who were saved but did not die who entered the millennium in earth bodies, throughout history all those who never accepted God or Christ, and of course our only enemy, Satan. Understanding all of this should cause us to live our lives focused on the mark as we walk (Ephesians 4:1-2), stand (Ephesians 6:14), press (Philippians 3:12-16) or run (Hebrews 12:1-3), 'the race that is set before us (notice it is one race; 'the race,' and one fight of the faith; 1 Timothy 4:12). This mindset John (same writer) says blesses us to live pure lives (1 John 2:1-3).

We will approach this chapter differently than we did the others because it is best to go through it systematically so that this much detail is prayerfully understood.

20:1–3. Chapter 20 begins with the familiar phrase, **And I saw an angel** (cf. 7:2; 8:2; 10:1; 14:6; 18:1; 19:17). The “and” with which this chapter begins suggests that it continues the sequence of events beginning in 19:1, which is introduced with the words “after this.” In chapter 19, the Greek has “and” at the beginnings of 15 verses (but it is omitted in the NIV in vv. 4, 8, 10–11, 13–16, and 21 and is trans. “then” in vv. 5–6, 9, and 19 and “but” in v. 20). The use of the word “and” (*kai*) often indicates an action that follows in logical and/or chronological sequence. Accordingly, there is no reason why chapter 20 should not be considered as describing events that follow chapter 19. “And” (*kai*) continues throughout chapter 20, beginning each verse except verse 5. There is

thus no linguistic or grammatical suggestion that these events are anything other than events following the second coming of Christ and occurring in sequence.^[1]

B. Key Words and Apocalyptic Definitions:

Accordingly John saw an angel descend from heaven holding the key to the Abyss and a great chain. The angel grabbed Satan, the dragon (cf. 12:3–4, 7, 9, 13, 16–17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13), that ancient serpent (12:9, 14–15), bound him, and threw him into the Abyss, and locked it, in order to prevent Satan’s work of deceiving the nations any more for a thousand years.^[2] This is a time of peace that the Lord wants to be undisturbed until a later time after those who come into the millennium with children have a chance to have them and for these children to grow up and turn against God.

1. The “bottomless pit” spoken of in Revelation 20:1 is not the same as hell; it is the “abyss” that we have met before in our studies (Rev. 9:1–2, 11; 11:7; 17:8).^[3]
2. Satan is not cast into hell immediately because God still has one more task for him to perform. Instead, , Satan is confined in the bottomless pit for 1,000 years.^[4]
3. First, Satan was cast out of *heaven* (Rev. 12:9), and now he is cast out of *earth!*^[5]

The Millennium

The word *millennium* is a Latin word composed of *mille*, “a thousand,” and *annum*, “year”; thus, a thousand years, whatever this particular Scripture portion may mean. The passage begins by informing us that during this time, Satan is cast into the bottomless pit, where he remains bound for **a thousand years**. This pit is not **hell**. Satan seems to have no power to resist this act of an angel in binding him. John now sees a great

multitude who have not worshiped the beast, sitting upon thrones and reigning with Christ for a thousand years. This is not the place to argue about the Millennium. [6]

Apart from frequent mention of the thousand years, no details are given concerning the reign of Christ on earth except that it is a time of great blessing. Many Old Testament passages supply additional information about the Millennium. The main point of the revelation here is that the Millennium follows the Second Coming. [7]

1. 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; 12:1–6; 30:18–26; 35:1–10). [8]

2. **What is the purpose** of the millennial kingdom?

a) 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). [9]

b) 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). [10]

c) The Tribulation martyrs will be raised from the dead and given glorious thrones and rewards.

i) 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; 1 Thes. 4:13–18; 2 Tim. 2:12).

ii) Some Bible students believe that the Old Testament saints will also be a part of this “first resurrection” (Dan. 12:1–4).^[11]

It certainly seems clear, however, that the OT, over and over again, refers to a great and glorious time to come when peace will prevail on the earth, when the Messiah will reign in righteousness, and when nature will be restored to her original beauty (see, for example, Isa 9:6, 7; 11:1; 30:15-33; also chs. 35; 44; and 49; 65:17–66:14, Jer 23:5, 6, etc.).^[12]

Events that precede the thousand years are:

1. The second coming of Christ.
2. The beast and the false prophet are thrown into the fiery lake.
3. The armies were destroyed.
4. Satan was bound and locked in the Abyss.
5. Thrones of judgment introduced
6. The martyred dead of the Tribulation resurrected.

These events revealed in their proper sequence make it clear that the thousand-year period follows all these events, including the second coming of Christ. The conclusion that the Second Coming is premillennial is clearly supported by a normal, literal interpretation of this text.^[13]

The Thrones

20:4. 'Then I saw the thrones': Next in the series of revelations John recorded that he **saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.** In addition he saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their standing true to the Lord and His Word in the Great Tribulation. The fact that John could see them implies that they had received intermediate bodies in heaven and were awaiting their resurrections.^[14]

1. A distinction should be made between what John saw and what he received as revelation. Though he could see the souls, he was informed that they had been beheaded because they had refused to worship the beast or his image and would not receive his mark. What John saw was not all the souls in heaven but a particular generation of martyred dead who had been contemporaneous with the world ruler, the beast out of the sea (13:1).^[15]

2. John apparently was not told the identity of the individuals seated on the thrones. They evidently do not include the martyred dead themselves. Christ had predicted (Luke 22:29–30) that the 12 disciples would “eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.” As the disciples are also a part of the church, the body of Christ, it would be natural for them to sit on these thrones.^[16]

3. The Judge is Jesus Christ, for the Father has committed all judgment to Him (Matt. 19:28; John 5:22–30; Acts 17:31). These lost sinners rejected Christ in life; now they must be judged by Him and face eternal death.^[17]

4. According to the Scriptures a series of judgments is related to Christ's return. The beast and the false prophet will be cast into the fiery lake (Rev. 19:20), Satan will be cast into the Abyss (20:1–3), and then the martyred dead of the Great Tribulation will be judged and rewarded (v. 4). In addition, Israel will be judged (Ezek. 20:33–38), and the Gentiles will be judged (Matt. 25:31–46). These judgments precede and lead up to the millennial kingdom.^[18]

a) John stated that these martyred dead **came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.** Their coming to life suggests that they will be given resurrected bodies. In addition to receiving the visual revelation, John

was informed as to the meaning and character of the judgment that was here taking place.^[19]

b) 20:5. John was also informed that **the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended**. This refers to the resurrection of the wicked dead, discussed later (vv. 11–15).^[20]

The Resurrection

The first resurrection may easily be considered as occurring in stages—the dead in Christ, then we who are alive, and then, after a brief period, these martyrs and faithful ones of the Tribulation period.^[21]

1. As the context which follows indicates, “the first resurrection” (vv. 5–6) contrasts with the last resurrection (vv. 12–13), which is followed by “the second death” (vv. 6, 14). It is first in the sense of *before*. All the righteous, regardless of when they are raised, take part in the resurrection which is first or before the final resurrection (of the wicked dead) at the end of the Millennium. This supports the conclusion that the resurrection of the righteous is by stages.^[22]

a) Christ was “the Firstfruits” (1 Cor. 15:23), which was preceded by the token resurrection of a number of saints (Matt. 27:52–53). Then will occur the Rapture of the church, which will include the resurrection of dead church saints and the translation of living church saints (1 Thes. 4:13–18).^[23]

b) The resurrection of the two witnesses will occur in the Great Tribulation (Rev. 11:3, 11).^[24]

c) Then the resurrection of the martyred dead of the Great Tribulation will occur soon after Christ returns to earth (20:4–5).^[25]

d) To these may be added the resurrection of Old Testament saints which apparently will also occur at this time, though it is not mentioned in this text (cf. Isa. 26:19–21; Ezek. 37:12–14; Dan. 12:2–3).^[26]

20:6. All those who share in the resurrection of the righteous are said to be blessed and holy, and the second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.^[27]

While all the righteous will be raised before the Millennium, individuals will retain their identities and their group identifications such as Gentile believers and believers in Israel in the Old Testament, the church of the New Testament, and saints of the Tribulation.^[28]

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