

# Living Word Fellowship Church

## An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 20

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### I. 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.<sup>[1]</sup>

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.<sup>[2]</sup>

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).<sup>[3]</sup>

b) The resurrection of the two witnesses will occur in the Great Tribulation (Rev. 11:3, 11).<sup>[4]</sup>

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

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).<sup>[6]</sup>

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.<sup>[7]</sup>

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.<sup>[8]</sup>

## II. The Events that Takes Place After the Millennium

### A. Introduction:

Even during the millennium there is a separation between heaven and earth, humanity transfigured and humanity in the flesh. Hence an apostasy can take place at its close. In the judgment on this the world of nature is destroyed and renewed, as the world of history was before the millennium: it is only then that the new heaven and new earth are perfected. The *millennial* heaven and earth, connected but separate, are but a foretaste of this everlasting state, when the upper and lower congregations shall be no longer separate, and new Jerusalem shall descend from God out of heaven. Man's birth sin, the flesh, shall be the only influence during the millennium to prevent the saving of all souls. When this time of grace shall end, no other shall succeed. For what can move him in whom the Church's visible glory, whilst evil is restrained, evokes no longing for communion with the Church's King? As the history of nations ended with the

manifestation of the Church in glory, so that of mankind in general shall end with the separation of the just from the wicked (v. 12) (*Auberlen*).<sup>[9]</sup>

## B. Satan and His Final War Against Christ:

1. 7-10. At the end of the Millennium, we have a strange episode inserted, the source of which could be nothing but divine inspiration, namely, that Satan will be loosed from his prison, and will go out once more to deceive the nations, assembling them to war (vv. 7, 8), and leading them to an attack upon the camp of the saints . . . and the beloved city (v. 9). This probably refers to the earthly city of Jerusalem, though some have made it refer to the Holy City, which seems to be most irrational.<sup>[10]</sup>

2. Scott has a good point here when he says, “No mention is made of how Christ and His people regard this last mad attempt of Satan. All is silent in the camp and city. The apostate nations march into the jaws of death. Their judgment is sudden, swift, overwhelming, and final (*op. cit.*, p. 388). With the destruction of God’s enemies, Satan is seized and cast into hell, where he will be forever. The beast and the false prophet have already been consigned to this place of awful doom. No doubt the plural pronoun they (v. 10) refers to this trinity of evil.<sup>[11]</sup>

3. The question is often asked, How can one account for this last rebellion after the beneficent Millennial reign of Christ? For one thing, it reveals that a thousand years of imprisonment do not alter the evil character of the devil. Furthermore, unregenerate man does not change, and though the whole earth is under the rule of Christ, great multitudes obey him only from fear and not from love.<sup>[12]</sup>

### 4. Who are these who will follow Satan?

a) 20:7–8. John was told what would happen at the conclusion of the thousand years. Satan will be released from the Abyss, his prison, and will make a final attempt to induce nations—called Gog and Magog—to come and battle with him against Christ. Satan’s release will produce a worldwide

rebellion against the millennial reign of Christ. The armies will be so vast in numbers that they are said to be like the sand on the seashore. <sup>[13]</sup>

b) Those who survive the Tribulation will enter the Millennium in their natural bodies, and they will bear children and repopulate the earth (Isa. 65:18–25). <sup>[14]</sup>

c) The shallowness of their professions will become apparent when Satan is released. The multitudes who follow Satan are evidently those who have never been born again in the millennial kingdom. <sup>[15]</sup> These had a form of godliness (Revelation 11:2; 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 1 John 2:18-24; Acts 20:27-31). This exist in the church today. This is why as shepherds we must guard the flock.

### C. The Final Battle, the War of Gog and Magog:

1. The question has been raised as to whether this war is the same one discussed in Ezekiel 38–39, where Gog and Magog are also mentioned (Ezek. 38:2). These are two different battles, for in the war of Ezekiel 38–39 the armies come primarily from the north and involve only a few nations of the earth. But the battle in Revelation 20:7–9 will involve all nations, so armies will come from all directions. <sup>[16]</sup>

a) Furthermore nothing in the context of Ezekiel 38–39 is similar to the battle in Revelation, as there is no mention of Satan or of millennial conditions. In Revelation 20:7 the context clearly places the battle at the end of the Millennium, whereas the Ezekiel battle takes place in connection with end-time events. <sup>[17]</sup>

b) In contrast with Ezekiel 38, there is no mention of earthquake, hail, or other disasters. The only similarity is that in both cases there is fire from heaven, a frequent method of divine judgment on the earth (cf. Gen. 19:24; Ex. 9:23–24; Lev. 9:24; 10:2; Num. 11:1; 16:35; 26:10; 1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:10, 12, 14; 1 Chron. 21:26; 2 Chron. 7:1, 3; Ps. 11:6; etc.). <sup>[18]</sup>

2. 20:9. The armies will surround the camp of God's people, the city He loves. This could mean only Jerusalem, which will be the capital of the world government of Christ throughout the millennial kingdom (cf. Isa. 2:1–5). The result is immediate judgment. Fire will come down from heaven and devour them.<sup>[19]</sup>

a) 20:10. After Satan's followers will be destroyed, he will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur. Being cast into the lake that was prepared for him and his angels is the final judgment on Satan (cf. Matt. 25:41). Most significant as a support of the doctrine of eternal punishment is the concluding statement, They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. The word "they" includes the devil, the beast, and the false prophet. The lake of burning sulfur is not annihilation, for the beast and false prophet are still there a thousand years after they experienced their final judgment (Rev. 19:20).<sup>[20]</sup>

b) There are degrees of punishment in hell (Matt. 11:20–24). Each lost sinner will receive just what is due him, and none will be able to argue with the Lord or question His decision. God knows what sinners are doing, and His books will reveal the truth.<sup>[21]</sup>

#### D. The Last Judgment:

1. *The Last Judgment. 20:11-14.* One more great universe-embracing event must take place before there can be eternal peace and righteousness, namely, the judgment of the impenitent dead. This is set forth in the last paragraph of this epoch-crowded chapter. A day of judgment, sometimes called "The Last Day," is referred to more often by our Lord than by all of the apostles and their writings put together (see Mt 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; Jn 5:28, 29; 6:39-54; 11:24; Heb 9:27; 10:27). Christ is everywhere identified as the judge (see especially Acts 17:31; Jn 5:22-27; II Tim 4:1). Bishop Gore spoke for all the Church when he said, "It seems to me any believer in the God of the prophets, and of our Lord, must believe with them in a Day of God, as bringing the present age of human history to its climax" (*Belief in Christ*, p. 149).<sup>[22]</sup>

2. From the judgment for crime exercised by the State, thousands escape every year; in fact, many crimes are not even known to those in authority. But no one will be able to escape this judgment. The dead will be called forth from their graves, and from the sea, from Hades itself (v. 13); and those whose names are not found in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death (v. 14). The records of every human life in this vast assembly will then be produced. Death itself, it seems, is not abolished until the Great White Throne is set up, and human destiny is forever settled. If we believe and embrace with joy the promises of eternal glory that are in this book, we must also believe with equal conviction that this terrible doom of the unrepentant dead is equally true. (For a discussion of the entire matter of judgment, see my book, *Therefore Stand*, the section called, “A Righteous Judgment to Come,” pp. 438-466).<sup>[23]</sup>

#### E. The Great White Throne Judgment:

1. 20:11. The great white throne apparently differs from the throne mentioned more than 30 times in Revelation beginning with 4:2.<sup>[24]</sup> Not the following:

a) It apparently is located neither in heaven nor earth but in space, as suggested by the statement, Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them.<sup>[25]</sup>

b) It is not indicated who sits on this throne, but probably it is Christ Himself as in 3:21 (cf. Matt. 19:28; 25:31; John 5:22; 2 Cor. 5:10—though the throne in these references is not necessarily the same throne as in Rev. 20:11).<sup>[26]</sup>

c) 20:12. The purpose of establishing the great white throne is to judge the dead. John wrote that the dead, great and small, stood before the throne. From other Scriptures it seems that all the righteous dead have been raised, including Old Testament saints, the dead of the Great Tribulation, and the church saints, the body of Christ (see comments on v. 5). Thus it may be assumed that verses 11–15 refer to the judgment of the wicked dead, who according to verse 5 would not be resurrected until after the thousand years and will have no part in what is called “the first resurrection.”<sup>[27]</sup>

d) The White Throne Judgment will be nothing like our modern court cases. At the White Throne, there will be a Judge but no jury, a prosecution but no defense, a sentence but no appeal. No one will be able to defend himself or accuse God of unrighteousness. What an awesome scene it will be!<sup>[28]</sup>

2. “The Book of Life” will be there, containing the names of God’s redeemed people (Phil. 4:3; Rev. 21:27; note also 13:8; 17:8). No unsaved person will have his or her name in the Lamb’s Book of Life; only true believers are recorded there (Luke 10:20).<sup>[29]</sup>

a) At that judgment John saw books ... opened, including a book called the book of life. The text does not state clearly what these books are, but the first opened books may refer to human works and “the book of life” is the record of those who are saved (cf. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27). The fact that these dead have not been raised before is evidence in itself that they do not have eternal life and that their judgment is a judgment of their works.<sup>[30]</sup>

b) Book of life—(Exod. 32:32, 33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Phil. 4:3; ch. 3:5; 13:8; 21:27.) Besides the general book of all, there is a special book for believers, in which their names are written, not for their works, but for Christ’s work for, and in, them: ‘the Lamb’s book of life.’ Electing grace has singled them out from the mass. according to their works. We are justified *by* faith, judged *according to* (not *by*) our works.<sup>[31]</sup>

3. The Second Death:

a) The lake of fire (vv. 14–15) referred to as “the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (19:20) is the same as gehenna (cf. Matt. 5:22, 29–30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6) and is translated “hell” in the NIV and KJV with the word “fire” added in several passages. Actually gehenna was originally a name for the place of burning refuse, located in the Valley of

Hinnom south of Jerusalem. The term, however, goes far beyond this geographic background and refers to eternal punishment.<sup>[32]</sup>

b) 20:14–15. Following the great white throne judgment death and hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death, the final destination of the wicked. The doctrine of eternal punishment has always been a problem to Christians who enjoy the grace of God and salvation in Christ. The Bible is clear, however, that the punishment of the wicked is eternal. This is confirmed in verse 10, where the beast and the false prophet are still in the lake of fire after the thousand years of Christ's millennial reign. Though the wicked dead will receive resurrection bodies, they will be quite unlike the resurrection bodies of the saints. The former people will continue to be sinful but will be indestructible and will exist forever in the lake of fire.<sup>[33]</sup>

c) When the judgment is finished, all of the lost will be cast into hell, the lake of fire, the second death. Many people reject the biblical doctrine of hell as being "unchristian," and yet Jesus clearly taught its reality (Matt. 18:8; 23:15, 33; 25:46; Mark 9:46). A sentimental kind of humanistic religion will not face the reality of judgment, but teaches a God who loves everyone into heaven and sends no one to hell.<sup>[34]</sup>

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