

Revelation Chapter 20 Notes

Handout

This chapter raises some of the most controversial aspects of Revelation. The 1000 year reign has posed problems for commentators for centuries. When is the 1000 years? Is it a real 1000 years? Is it a metaphorical (numerological) 1000 years? Does the 1000 years come before Jesus returns? Does it come after Jesus returns? Is it the age of the church? Why bother with 1000 years of peace if we are only going to let Satan loose again? What does it mean for Satan to be bound? All of these questions and more face those who venture into Chapter 20.

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

Angel - again God sends his messengers to carry out his plan

Key to the bottomless pit - this is the place where the demons live and where they came from in the beginning. The key shows that God even holds power over the home of the demons.

Seized the dragon - Satan has no power, not even over the angels who are more powerful because they work with God's power in Christ.

Bound him... threw him... locked and sealed - Satan can no longer go walking about the earth deceiving people until he is allowed back on the earth.

Must be let out - evidently part of God's plan.

For a little while - God is still in charge and Satan will never rule forever.

4 Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They 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 a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years.

Thrones and those seated on them - we are not sure who these people are. Speculation has ranged from an angelic court, to all the martyrs who had been judged by earthly courts and now will sit in judgment themselves.

Souls of those who had been beheaded... they had not worshipped the beast - souls is the terms used to describe those who were under the altar, who had lost their lives for Christ. The Greek allows for two interpretations of this section. One is that there is only a single group of people... martyrs who did not worship the beast. It could also allow that there are two groups... those who were martyrs and those who did not worship the beast... meaning all of the followers of the Lamb. One other way to take this section is to assume that the

martyrs represent all believers even if they have not died... so all reign with Christ during the 1000 years.

Came to life - this has been seen in several different ways. It has been seen as some sort of spiritual resurrection in which the dead come from sleep into spirit life again. It has been seen as referring to the reign of the church when they are let loose into the world. Finally, and I believe rightly, it refers to physical resurrection. The Greek uses the same word John uses to describe the resurrection of Jesus. All of Revelation ultimately points to a resurrected life for all who believe... not merely an eternity in heaven.

The rest of the dead - again this can carry two meanings. If the martyrs above, refers only to martyrs, then the rest can refer to the rest of those who believed in Christ. If martyrs refers to all believers (either represents all believers or there are two groups referred to) then the rest means those who died and did not believe in Christ.

First resurrection - this means that after the 1000 years there will be another resurrection of the rest.

Second death - physical death was the first death. This is hinting that there is another death awaiting those who did not give their lives over to the Lamb.

Priests of God and of the Lamb - these will have the honor of serving the very creator of the universe.

7 When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. 9 They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. 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.

Satan will be released - the thousand years is but a prelude to the final chapter of the story

Will come out and deceive the nations - what this appears to imply is that Satan is not in the end the source of evil in the world. There is something in the very heart of humans that makes them want to follow others and not God that is not even done away with after 1000 years. This also implies that God continues to allow people the freedom to make their own decisions.

Gog and Magog - while these names have been associated with historic or even present national entities (Scythians, Russians, Chinese, etc.) here they more than likely represent all of those opposed to God and his reign in the world.

Marched - they were ready for battle and believed that they had surrounded the small group of survivors and the great city

Fire came down - God is having no part of this. God allows them to make the final decision that they will attempt to destroy his people and then he destroys them.

Lake of fire - this is the final resting place for those who oppose God. Rather than eternal life on the new earth (large place)... they receive eternal punishment in the lake of fire (small place).

11 Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. 13 And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done.

Great white throne - here we are once again able to see into the very heavens and see God himself enthroned because heaven has fled away. There is no more separation...all is one.

Dead, great and small - now we have the final judgment. There is some disagreement about who gets judged here. Some say it is merely the enemies of God since all of God's followers have already been resurrected and are with Christ doing the ruling and reigning. Others say this includes all the dead...now including the dead who were not raised at the first resurrection. Still others say it is all who were not martyrs...thus it is followers of Christ as well as those who opposed him...including those who were destroyed in the final battle.

Book of life - there appears to be two books present. The first is the book of deeds which records all we did in our lives. This forms the basis for the judgment. This is not salvation by works, but instead the recognition that a life in Christ brings forth a certain quality of life and thus certain deeds.

14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; 15 and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Death and Hades - now the final enemies of God and God's desire to restore the world are done away with. Death which robs people of their vitality and life, and Hades which is the haunt of the enemy are all removed from existence.

The second death - this is the spiritual death in which those who opposed God. Again, rather than eternal life there is eternal death. Some speculate that this means the end to conscious existence and others say it is prelude to eternal pain.

Book of life - evidently this is where the final distinction is made. Good Calvinists say our names are either in it, or not, from the beginning of time. Revelation appears to suggest however that it is our choice whether or not our names appear therein.