

The Final Judgement

Revelation 20:7-15

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In Revelation 19, we saw the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The Bible says, “As the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” The Bible teaches that Christ came the first time in His first Advent to bring salvation for sin, and He will come a second time in judgment and to reign. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, that He is coming in power, in glory, in majesty and that He will reign on the earth for 1,000 years. All of this is happening sequentially, and we’re going through it in the book of Revelation. So He came the first time to suffer and die; He’s coming the second time to judge and to make war.

We discovered that when Jesus Christ returns, two wonderful things will happen. He will put an end to war, and He will set up His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years. So the King comes back and establishes His kingdom on the throne of David. I emphasize that because it’s what is called “the Davidic kingdom.” The Davidic covenant was God’s promise to David that on his throne would sit his greater Son, Messiah, and “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom, there would be no end.”

When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary the birth of her Son, he said that “The Lord God would give Him the throne of His father David,” and He would reign forever. Mary understood that to mean that she would give birth to the Messiah.

When Jesus sets up His kingdom for 1,000 years, there will be four things that will take place. First, He removes Satan from the earth, Revelation 20:1-3. He bound him and threw him into a bottomless pit. In our study today, we’ll go to the end of the millennium and see that Satan is loosed out of the bottomless pit and leads a revolt against God. Secondly, He resurrects the tribulation saints, Revelation 20:4-6, and possibly also the Old Testament saints. They will reign with Christ for 1,000 years. Thirdly, He reverses the curse. There are a plethora of Old Testament verses talking about the peace and prosperity and the earth being restored to a Garden of Eden like condition when Jesus reigns as King. Romans 8:19-22 speaks of this. Then fourthly, He reigns on the throne of David, Luke 1:32-33.

The book of Revelation is the Grand Central Station of all Scripture. All the Bible comes together in one book—Revelation. So in preaching Revelation, I have to pull together all the Bible has to say about these important end-time events.

Now in our study today, we come to the end of the millennium. Christ died on the Cross, He went back to heaven on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended, in Acts 2. The church was born on the day of Pentecost. From that point to now is called “the church age.” It’s also known as the time of God’s grace. Then the tribulation period, also known as the 70th week of Daniel’s prophecy, begins after the rapture. 1 Thessalonians 4 is one of many sections or passages that speaks of the rapture of the church. I believe in a pre-tribulation rapture. At the end of the

tribulation is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, Revelation 19. Then we are introduced to the kingdom age, which is another term for the 1,000 years, the millennial reign of Christ.

Now in our text, we will be at the end of the millennium or just before there will be the new heaven and the new earth, Revelation 21 and 22. So what we read about today will be at the end of the kingdom age. One of the events we will read about is the great white throne judgment, which goes from Revelation 20:11-15.

So that is an overview that brings us to where we are in Revelation. We are at the end of the millennium, the 1,000-year reign of Christ.

Now there are three things that happen in our text today. Number one, there will be a final, Satanically-lead revolt at the end of the millennium against Christ, who is reigning from Jerusalem. Number two, there will be a final doom of Satan when he is cast into the lake of fire, which is eternal hell. Number three, there will be a final judgment of all unsaved, at what is commonly called “the great white throne judgment.” So you might say there will be a final revolt, a final removal of Satan and a final retribution of sinners on the day of the great white throne judgment.

The first section is in verses 7-9, the final revolt lead by Satan. John says, “Now when the thousand years have expired...”—now notice the time period; it is at the end of the millennium —“...Satan will be released from his prison.”

When I read that, I think, Why?! “God, You should have consulted me. I would have advised you wisely to leave him in the pit. What’s the deal here?!” We’re going to look at why God let Satan out at the end of the millennium. In Revelation 20:1-3, we see him bound. Now we see him loosed.

Verse 8 says Satan “will go out to deceive the nations...”—that’s what he has done all throughout history—“...which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.” So during the millennium, the population will explode, and there will be a lot of people living in this paradise on earth. Many of them will follow Satan in this rebellion.

Verse 9, “They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.”

Notice that this revolt happens at the end of the 1,000-year reign. Satan, who had been bound, will be released out of his prison and goes out to deceive, verses 7-8.

Satan has been in the pit, the abyssos, the pit, for 1,000 years. When he has been released, he hadn’t changed a bit during that time. The first thing he does is to go out to deceive. The devil’s never going to change. Those who teach universalism, that Satan is going to repent in the end and be saved and be in heaven—I don’t think so. The Bible says he’s going to be banished “forever and ever” in the lake of fire. So Satan is still up to his old tricks.

When it mentions “the four corners of the earth,” and the reference to “Gog and Magog,” in verse 8, don’t confuse this as being the same battle as in Ezekiel 37-39. It is not the same battle. Ezekiel’s message is something that happens at the beginning of the tribulation. We don’t know for sure when that battle takes place; it could be before the rapture, after the rapture or in the middle of the tribulation. Probably at the beginning or middle of the tribulation, Russia and other nations are going to invade the whole land of Israel. The Antichrist is going to war against them, and God is going to defend Israel at that time.

In the Bible, Gog and Magog were used metaphorically to speak of the enemies of God. It could be literally that they also are here again and come back for another round of battle against the Lord.

Verse 8, “whose number is as the sand of the sea.” What happens at the end of the tribulation is that to those who are considered sheep, Matthew 25:34, God says, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” They go into the millennium, but they are still in their mortal bodies. So only believers, saved individuals, enter the millennium in their normal, mortal bodies; they don’t have a glorified, resurrected body yet.

These people have 1,000 years to marry and have children, and their progeny do the same. And the Bible teaches that longevity will increase during the millennium. Many people will live out most of if not all of the 1,000 years. So it will be like a Garden of Eden type of environment. God is reigning as Christ on the throne in Jerusalem.

So there will be a lot of children born during the millennium. But Satan was bound during this time, and these people were not given an opportunity to decide whether to follow Christ or to follow the devil. The believers go into the millennium saved, but generations that are born during the millennium may begin to be hostile toward Christ and are not regenerated, not born again and not saved. They have a sinful nature, and we’ll see that at the end of this time, there is going to be a rebellion.

A common question I get is this: “Will we, as the church, be able to be deceived by the devil and become part of this final rebellion at the end of the millennium?” The answer is “No; that won’t happen.” It’s because the moment you are raptured, you are in a glorified body, and the Bible says that then you “shall always be with the Lord.” So we will be with Him in heaven, we’ll be with Him on earth and we’ll be with Him in the new heaven and the new earth. So there is no danger and no risk that you’ll be deceived at the end of the millennium.

So all those “whose number is as the sand of the sea,” is a reference to unbelievers who are influenced by the devil, and they actually have a coup to try to overthrow Christ from the throne. Think about that. You have lived for 1,000 years, in a perfect world with Jesus reigning on earth. That’s very cool! But at the end of that time, you’re so bent on your rebellion and sin that you try to war against Christ!

Then, in verse 9, “They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints...”—who were reigning with Christ—“...and the beloved city,” which is Jerusalem. Then this is what happens, and it doesn’t last very long: “And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.” So there is no contest here. Satan gets all these people together to war against Christ. But Christ basically uses the word of His mouth in power and with fire to incinerate them on the spot.

Where do all these wicked people go? They go to Hades, to hell. Then they will be resurrected from there and stand before the great white throne judgment and thrown into the lake of fire, which is eternal hell or the second death.

Why would God release the devil at the end of the millennium? The loosing of Satan would give mankind one final test after living in a perfect, theocratic kingdom on earth for 1,000 years. People born during the millennium were born into a perfect environment, and they, like the rest of mankind before them, will have to make a decision to either follow God or follow Satan. So after this 1,000 years, they are shown to be sinners by nature. The problem with mankind is not government, is not environment, it is a sinful, human nature.

We believe that this form or another form of government will work. If we just get a good education, or if we just buy stuff for everybody or if we just train them, we can create a utopian society. It’s not going to happen. Mankind has been tested and found wanting in every form of human government throughout all time. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. I think about all the tragedies that are happening in our nation. When will we wake up to the root cause of our problem? It’s not skin; it’s sin. The Bible says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”

When I see these politicians today saying that we have to clean up the environment and save the earth, I think, Wait until you see what God does to it! You talk about global warming! Peter says, “The elements will melt with fervent heat.” But it’s God’s; He created it. He’s sovereign God of the universe; He can do whatever He wants.

We’re reading here about the end of time. When Jesus comes back to rule His kingdom on earth, it won’t be the end of time, because mankind will still have 1,000 years. But at the end of the 1,000 years there will be the eternal state; time will be no more. Then there will be a final renovation of the earth. There will be a final retribution of the wicked and a final destruction of Satan. All these great events will be part of God’s mega-narrative in redeeming mankind on planet earth. It’s amazing to comprehend the big picture of what will be going on.

So the 1,000 years proves very well that man is a rebel. He is in rebellion against God, and we need to repent, fall down and confess Jesus as Lord. Only God’s grace can change man’s sinful heart.

The second thing that happens is in verse 10. Not only is there a Satanic revolt, but there is the final doom of Satan. “The devil, who deceived them...”—that’s what Satan is always doing—“...

was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are.” This is referring to the Antichrist and his religious sidekick, the false prophet. We saw them back in chapters 19 and 20. “And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” So the Antichrist, the false prophet and Satan will be tormented forever. No more devil forever!

I’m sorry that he ever existed, that Adam and Eve ever listened to him in the Garden of Eden. They messed everything up. But aren’t you glad that God has a redemptive plan? That God is going to redeem what man has ruined?

So they are thrown into hell forever and ever. The same concept of eternal life is eternal judgment. Hell is a very sobering subject to be preaching on. Hell is eternal—conscious torment for all eternity. The wicked are going to be in their resurrected bodies, they will be tormented and will be away from the presence of God forever.

You may not like that concept, but that’s what the Bible says and we must believe God’s holy Word.

So the conflict of the ages with Satan is finally over. It started way back in Isaiah 14, where it says in verses 13-14, “I will exalt my throne above the stars of God....I will be like the Most High.” Satan rebelled against God and was kicked out of heaven. That started the cosmic conflict.

Ezekiel 28:15 and 17 say that “Iniquity was found in you.” That’s referring to Lucifer, which means “the son of the morning,” also called Satan. The source of all evil is the heart of this wicked, fallen angel, Lucifer.

Skip Heitzig has written an excellent book on the study of Revelation. In it he says, “While Satan’s judgment was assured at the Cross—Jesus died to pay for our sins and to conquer Satan—it will be fully carried out at the conclusion of the millennium. The prophecy of Genesis 3:15 that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, the devil, will happen when Satan is cast out to the lake of fire. That will mark the end of Satan’s career. The one who desires to usurp God’s throne will instead spend eternity writhing in the lake of everlasting fire.” How true. So Satan is going to be thrown into hell.

Matthew 25:41, says, “He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” Jesus said that hell was not made for man but for the devil and his angels. And it will also be for those who follow him.

There is a devil, and right now he is not in the pit; he’s alive and well on planet earth. So the Bible says, “Be sober, be vigilant; your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

When it comes to the devil, people go to dangerous imbalances; they get all absorbed in that everything is caused by the devil. Comedian Flip Wilson said, “The devil made me do it!” That doesn’t work. There was 1,000 years without the devil, so they couldn’t say, “The devil made

me do it!" After the millennium, the devil was released, but it was their sinful hearts that were the problem. We have the world, the flesh and the devil that work together to distract us.

But don't get all focused on the devil. If you're a Christian, the Bible says, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." So the devil was defeated at the Cross, but his final destruction will not take place until he is thrown into this lake of fire. Then Satan will be destroyed. In Romans 16:20, the Apostle Paul says, "The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly." I like that.

The third thing that happens, in verses 11-15, is the final judgment of all the wicked or all the unsaved. John says, "Then I saw..."—there is the vision—"...a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God..."—the Greek has "the throne"—"...and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they..."—that is, "these resurrected, wicked, unbelievers"—"...were judged, each one according to his works." And they learned that their works could not save them. "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

This is a reality that is yet future. The wicked dead of all history, as we are approaching the end of time, will all be resurrected and will stand before the great white throne. Christ sits on that throne, the books will be opened, their works will condemn them, the Book of Life will be opened and their names are not written in it so they are cast into the second death, which is called the gehenna, in the Greek, or the lake of fire. This happens at the end of the millennium.

Again, no Christians today will be tempted by Satan at the end of the millennium. And no Christians that live will stand before this great white throne. Our sins were dealt with at the Cross. If you have been born again, you are forgiven and you are free. Praise the Lord for that! So you won't be in this group. You're not going to stand before this great white throne. Christians will stand before the bema reward seat of Christ, which happens much earlier to the church. But we won't be judged for our sin.

The judge on the throne is Jesus Christ. You say, "Well, it doesn't say 'Jesus Christ' in the passage." I acknowledge that is true, but in John 5:27-29, Jesus Himself says that the Father "has given Him authority to execute judgment." The Father will judge no one, but He has entrusted all judgment to the Son. So we believe the one on the throne is Jesus Christ.

How fitting that is; the very world that rejected Him and crucified Him, spit on Him and mocked Him and said, "Crucify Him!" will have to answer to Him. This is why Paul said, "Every knee should bow...and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Either you bow your knee now and it means salvation, or you bow your knee then and it means condemnation. But the same Jesus who was rejected on earth will come back to

earth and will stand as judge of all mankind.

Notice it says in verse 11, "The earth and the heaven fled away." That has always mystified me. Then it says, "And there was found no place for them." I've never understood what that means. Isn't it interesting that the first verse in chapter 21 says, "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away"? They were destroyed. Peter said it was done by fire. So a good interpretation of this is that at this time of the great white throne, the physical earth that we live on right now will be completely destroyed and done away with. That's what that verse says.

Some feel this is just a figure of speech in saying that there is nowhere to hide. That's a possibility. But in light of what's in chapter 21, I believe that at this time, this earth and this heaven—all that is seen is temporal, and that is not seen is eternal. Where it says there's "a new heaven and a new earth," it's the same concept in Genesis where God "created." The word is "bara" in the Hebrew. It means "to make something out of nothing." So God creates. He doesn't renovate; He creates a whole new heaven and a whole new earth, which is the eternal state. We're going to get to live in this new heaven.

We'll be reading all about this new heaven later in Revelation. There will be no more judgments, just the glories and the splendors of the new heaven and the new earth. So I believe the reference in chapter 20, verse 11, is the fulfillment of chapter 21, verse 1; that the first heaven and earth is destroyed, and there is a new heaven and a new earth.

I believe that somewhere in the universe—not in heaven and not on the earth; commentators say somewhere out in space—this great white throne judgment will take place. And the subjects of this great white throne judgment are all the unsaved from all of history; only unbelievers, wicked dead will be there.

And the basis for this judgment, verses 12-13, will be the books. That is plural—"books." It could be that the Word of God is the first book opened, and God's law, the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue—"Thou shall not...thou shall not...—condemns these wicked sinners. It's interesting that in John 12:48, Jesus said, "The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." In Galatians 3:10, Paul said, "It is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.'"

The "books" could also be a reference to the book of works. In Ecclesiastes 12:14, Solomon says, "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." So there will be books that will be opened up that actually record everything you thought, everything you said and everything you did. Even the things done in secret will be proclaimed on the housetop. So these wicked dead will have their lives completely exposed by these books of their works. So they will try to be judged by their works, but they will not meet the standards.

Then the "Book of Life" is the focus, in verse 12. "And another book was opened, which is the

Book of Life.” It is mentioned again in verse 15. This Book of Life is the book that contains the names of all those who are saved. Paul mentions it in Philippians 4:3: he said those “whose names are in the Book of Life.”

So when you are born, you are born physically in sin. When you are born again in the Spirit, you become a child of God, and your name is written down in the Book of Life. How wonderful it is to know that, as we sing in the hymn:

“There’s a new name written down in glory,

And it’s mine, and it’s mine.

Oh, yes, it’s mine, yes, it’s mine.

With my sins forgiven, I am bound for heaven,

Nevermore to roam.”

I remember being a young boy in church and hearing this sermon preached. I was so worried that my name was not written in the Book of Life. The day that I repented and believed in Jesus Christ I knew that I was forgiven and that my name was written down in glory.

Do you know if your name is written in the Book of Life? Do you have that assurance? How glorious it is to know that I won’t be there on that day of judgment.

And I don’t think, as Christians, that we will be watching this judgment. How sad it would be to see friends and family and people we know in this crowd whose names are not in the Book of Life. There’s nothing more important than for you to make sure you have repented of your sins and been born again of the Holy Spirit.

In verses 14-15, not being in the Book of Life means that they were cast into the lake of fire. “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Whenever the Bible speaks of resurrection, it is always referring to the physical body. The Bible knows nothing of a “spiritual resurrection.” And the Bible speaks of two resurrections: one to life and one to damnation; one to salvation and one to condemnation. The “first resurrection,” verse 6, is only for believers. Jesus rose from the dead, and believers in the church age will rise from the dead. The Old Testament saints and the tribulation saints will also rise from the dead. All of these will be part of the first resurrection. Then at the end of the 1,000 years, there will be only one resurrection in what is called the “second resurrection.” That will only be for unbelievers. So all the wicked dead from all of history will be resurrected then.

A lot of people don’t realize that even non-Christians will be resurrected; not to go to heaven but to go to hell. So when their bodies, which will be an eternal body, are resurrected, they will go

to hell for all eternity. When you die outside of Christ, you go immediately to Hades. In verses 13-14 in the English Bible, the reference to hell is the Greek word "Hades." In the Old Testament, the equivalent was the word "Sheol."

In Luke 16, Jesus described Hades and how it was before Jesus died and rose from the dead. It had two compartments. One was a place of torment, and the other was a place of comfort known as "Abraham's bosom." Jesus told the story of a rich man and Lazarus, the poor man. The rich man died and went to hell or Hades. Being in torment, he looked over the chasm and saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom and said, "Father Abraham...send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." The Lord described that there was a great gulf between the two compartments, and they couldn't cross over it.

I've had people say to me, "Well, if I'm going to hell, all my friends are going with me. We're going to have asbestos suits, asbestos beer cans and asbestos cell phones, and we're going to party in hell." No, you won't. You won't want anyone to be with you in hell. And you're going to be with the devil forever! It's not a place you want to go.

So Jesus described these two compartments as one where there is comfort and one where there is torment. Before the Cross, this is what the underworld was like. Everyone went there, either to comfort or to torment.

Now when Jesus died, He descended to Hades. But He only went to the compartment of Abraham's bosom, and He proclaimed that He had died on the Cross and had come. Then He took all those who were there waiting for the fulfillment of the Cross, and He ascended with them to heaven. Now the side of Hades known as Abraham's bosom is vacated. It has a "Closed" sign on it. So when a Christian dies today, they don't go to Hades, to Abraham's bosom; they go immediately to the presence of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:8 says, "...to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." This is why Jesus told the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." They went to Abraham's bosom to gather them together and then went to heaven.

But nothing's changed in the compartment of torment. Everyone who dies outside of Christ goes to Hades. They are there with the rich man in torment. So everything we are reading in this closing episode of the great white throne is about people who are in Hades. Their bodies will be resurrected from the graves. Whenever this passage uses the word "death," it refers to their physical bodies, and whenever it refers to "Hades," it is referring to their soul and spirit. Their body and soul will be reunited and stand before this great white throne of judgment.

Verse 15, "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." And notice verse 6 says that this is the "second death." So they die physically, when their soul and spirit is separated from their body, and then they die spiritually, when they are separated from God for all eternity. The word "death" means "separation." So verse 15 is a reference to the resurrection of the wicked. They will stand before the great white throne and then will be thrown

into the lake of fire.

The phrase “lake of fire,” in verse 15, is a different Greek word than the word “Hades.” It’s the Greek word “gehenna.” That’s significant, because this is what we commonly refer to as “hell.” It’s the final destination of all the wicked dead; they go to gehenna. The name comes from a valley in the southeast corner of the hill of Zion in Jerusalem where they put all their trash and rubbish and burn it. It was known as the “Valley of Hinnom.” So it became symbolic of gehenna or the eternal hell.

So what we learn here is that hell is eternal, irreversible and is a conscious torment of the wicked dead. The Bible does not teach annihilation or universalism. It doesn’t teach purgatory; we don’t get our sins purged and then get to go to heaven. Once you die, your eternal state is fixed. All those who will stand before the great white throne died outside of Christ. Their destiny was already sealed when they died. Now the books are opened to prove that they are worthy of eternal death. The books are written about their works, because it’s evident now that their works cannot save them.

A lot of people think they can get to heaven by being good. No; when those books are opened, you’re going to be in big trouble. The only way to be saved is to take the hand of Jesus Christ.

Let me close with this, verse 15. “Anyone...”—the King James Bible says “Whosoever”—“... was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” They went to hell.

But “whosoever” has a familiar ring. The King James Bible, in John 3:16, says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

You have a choice: you can believe and be saved and have eternal life, or “anyone not found in the Book of Life” who rejects Him will spend eternity separated from God. The choice is yours.