

Revelation chapter 20

God's purging of earth continues in chapter 20. We read first of all regarding the descent of the angel with the key to the bottomless pit. We have already read in chapter 9 the name of this angel – he is Apollyon, the king of those creatures sent to torment men during the Tribulation.

Now the angel lays hold of the Dragon, binds him the chain, and casts him into the bottomless pit. In verse 4, we read of four separate names for this one. He is:

- The dragon
- The old serpent
- The Devil
- Satan

He has many other names in scripture which go to emphasise the complexity of this wicked creature. There is only one person who has more names in the bible and that is the Lord Jesus – for the same reason as the devil above.

In the previous chapter, the beast and the false prophet are cast directly into the lake of fire. The devil, on the other hand, is cast into the bottomless pit. Why the difference? Although this is another major step in the downfall of Satan, it is not the final step. He must be loosed a little season. We shall see the reason for this before the end of the chapter.

Satan is bound for a thousand years ie for the entire duration of the millennial kingdom of the Lord Jesus. In Eden, Eve complained to God, the serpent beguiled me and I did eat. It was the serpent's fault. Now for a thousand years. The devil is taken out of the way. During this time, the Lord Jesus will reign. A king shall reign in righteousness. He shall reign as a benevolent despot. Paradise shall be restored upon earth. The natural world shall be transformed. There will be peace among the nations. So when Satan is released from the pit, surely no one will follow him. On the contrary, he will raise an army. Men will show their depravity by taking sides with Satan against the Lord.

In verse 4, John saw thrones and them that sat upon them. Judgment was given unto them. John also sees the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus. In chapter 6:10, John saw under the altar the souls of them that had been slain for word of God and for their testimony. In Revelation 19, these martyrs have come out of the Great Tribulation, having been slain because they had not worshipped the beast nor his image, neither had they taken his mark upon themselves.

Now they are raised from the dead and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. John adds, "This is the first resurrection". Does this mean that the resurrection of I Corinthians 15 is also part of the first resurrection? Perhaps it simply means that it is the first resurrection in this new dispensation linked with the millennial kingdom. Upon such, the second death hath no power. The second death is to be judged at the Great White Throne and cast into the lake of fire (See verse 14). The only way to avoid the second death is to have a second birth ie to be born again as the Lord said to Nicodemus in John chapter 3.

At the end of verse 6, we shall see at last the fulfilment of God's desire for Israel. They shall be priests of God and of Christ. Israel shall be a kingdom of priests. When God chose the Levites, then the family of Aaron, it was an evidence of failure. God wanted every Jew to be a priest, but Israel failed miserably in this respect.

There will be a further day of resurrection at the end of the thousand years. Resurrection will take place for every man. In John chapter 5 the Lord made a great statement about this day.

Joh 5:28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

The atheist would tell us that after death, there is nothing but the Christian who reads and believes the bible knows otherwise. The dying thief at Calvary believed in life beyond the grave and asked the Lord to remember him. He got the promise that he would see the Lord again in Paradise. The story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 tells us about heaven and hell. Whether it be a parable or not, the Lord would not tell us something that was not true. There is a hell and there is torment there.

From verse 7 to verse 10, we get the detail of Satan's last rebellion. He is loosed from the pit. We know that he will always try to fight against God, but will he find a following amongst men who leaved under the righteous reign of Christ for a thousand years. Satan draws an army to himself from the four corners of the earth. The nations are described as "Gog and Magog". Some have said that this represents the nations of northern Europe, including Russia. Be it as it may, it is a major rebellion against God and His Christ. But God shows them no mercy - Fire descends from heaven and consumes them all. It is reminiscent of the fire that Elijah called down from heaven in II Kings chapter 1. The fire consumed the captains and their fifties.

The devil is cast into the lake of fire where he finds the Beast and the false prophet. They still exist after a thousand years. It tells the lie to Jehovah's witnesses who tell us there is no eternal judgment - only annihilation for the ungodly. If that were so, men would have a simple choice - heaven or nothing. For men who have no time for God in their lives, the second option might seem like a good choice. If only it were so but it is not.

Will Satan rule in hell as many a cartoonist would have us believe? Isaiah chapter 14 tells us that he will lose all his power and authority.

12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

16 They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms;

Like the kings of earth who are already there, Satan will become weak. What a dreadful end for Lucifer the son of the morning. He was perfect in the day that he was created until he said in his heart that he would exalt himself and be like the Most High. But that was the beginning of his fall, which takes place in five downward steps.

1. He is cast out from the throne of God
2. He loses his power over death
3. He is cast out of heaven by Michael
4. He is cast into the bottomless pit
5. He is cast into the lake of fire

In Isaiah 14, Lucifer thought five "I Will's" about himself . In Ezekiel 28, God replies with five "I will's" of His own. I will cast thee out. I will destroy thee. I will cast thee down etc.

What a contrast with the Lord Jesus in Philippians chapter 2. He took seven voluntary steps downwards, and God responded with seven steps in His exaltation of His Son.

From verse 11 to 15, we come to the final judgment of men at the Great White Throne. It is a great throne for there is no higher throne in the universe. It is a white throne for it speaks to us of absolute purity and righteousness in its judgment. It takes place at the very end of time - the earth and heaven flee away. The dead without exception whether small or great are called to stand before God.

We read about a book and books. The book singular is the book of life. When we trust in the Lord, our names are written in heaven, in the Lamb's book of life. This is the final determination of our eternal destiny. Those whose names are in this book will be saved. Those whose names are not found will be cast into the lake of fire.

But what about "the books"? In these books are the records of the lives of men. While all at the Great White Throne will be judged, the degree of judgment will be in accordance with our works. God is every righteous in his judgments. Big sinners will be judged more than little sinners.

But what about those who have believed in Christ? We know from such passages as I Corinthians chapter 3 and II Corinthians chapter 5 that the saints of God will be called to stand before the Lord Jesus at the judgment seat of Christ. Our works will be tried, whether good or bad. Motives will be judged and rewards given for the work that survives the judgment of the Lord. But there is no question of condemnation – of salvation being lost. In John chapter 5, the Lord tells us that he that believes in Him shall not come into condemnation but is passed from death unto life.