The Devil Gets His Due and So Will You

Revelation 20

Introduction

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We will continue our study of Revelation this afternoon with chapter 20. Many false ideas in religion take root in a misunderstanding of this chapter, particularly ideas about the millennial reign of Christ. With so many potentially difficult concepts to cover, I decided to stick closely to Johnny’s questions as they will assist us in touching on as many of these concepts as we can while keeping our study within a reasonable amount of time. We will go ahead and begin by reading chapter 20 from start to finish.

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Revelation 20:1-15 - Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

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And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

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Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations 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. 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. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

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Then I saw 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, 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 were judged, each one according to his works. 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.

The Thousand Years - Revelation 20:1-6.

1. Do you think the key and the chain in this passage are literal? If not literal, what do they symbolize? Verse 1.

No, they are not literal. The key symbolizes the power to bind, or to loose, such as it has previously been used in the book such as in Revelation 1:18, Revelation 3:7-9, and Revelation 9:1-2. G. K. Beale notes that we see this power or authority exercised in Revelation 6:8 where even Death and Hades obeyed the commands of the Lord. Each of these passages present the image of Christ’s sovereignty over the realm of “death and Hades” a realm which Satan was closely associated with. The Satanic realm is fully under Christ’s authority and the key represents His power to bind the Devil. The chain symbolizes the thing or things by which he is bound. In this case, his power has been severely diminished. He can no longer control the nations as he once controlled them. However, we must not understand this to mean that Satan is power*less*. Only this specific aspect or extent of his power has been restricted and even this is not permanent.

2. What are the four names by which the great deceiver is known and what is meant by each name? Verse 2.

The four names given to the great deceiver are first given in Revelation 12:9 and are repeated here in verse 2. He is called the great Dragon, the Serpent of Old, the Devil, and Satan.

Dragon - As a dragon, he is strong and ferocious, something to be feared, full of the power of destruction.

Serpent of Old - As the old serpent he is the cunning deceiver, we are reminded of Eden where from the beginning he has beguiled man with his craftiness and led them away from the presence of God. Paul says in:

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2 Corinthians 11:2 - But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Devil - The devil refers to his role as the accuser and the slanderer. He is the malignant enemy of God and man. Peter says in:

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1 Peter 5:8 - Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Satan - As Satan, he is the adversary, the opponent and antagonist of all that is good.

3. Was the binding of Satan punitive (for punishment) or preventive? Verse 3.

I would not say that it was punitive since the chapter talks about his punishment in verse 10 where he is “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are.* And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” Rather, the binding was preventive. He is now restrained from trapping and controlling the nations in the same way as he did before Jesus came. Several commentators remark that this ability was related to the power of paganism. Whether this specifically refers to paganism and its clash with Christianity or not, it clearly is related to his ability to call forth the sea beast and earth beast as well as Gog and Magog.

Homer Hailey had a pretty interesting discussion on this verse summarizing several earlier parts of the book which I wanted to share with you. He says:

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“The period of this ‘little time’ is not to be confused with the ‘short time’ of Revelation 12:12, for they are different periods; one is before and one follows the thousand years. In order to understand more clearly the scene before us, it will be helpful at this point to bring certain events and periods introduced earlier in the book into proper focus:

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1. The holy city was to be trodden underfoot forty-two months Revelation 11:2.

2. The witnesses were to prophesy under persecution twelve hundred sixty days Revelation 11:3.

3. The radiant woman was to be in the wilderness, protected from Stan and cared for by God and the Lamb, twelve hundred sixty days Revelation 12:6, or ‘time, times, and half a time,’ three and a half years Revelation 12:14.

4. The beast with authority to persecute and blaspheme would continue his unholy work forty-two months Revelation 13:5, cf. Daniel 7:25

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This period was the same for each and was interpreted to be the period of the Roman persecution. In two previous versions God said:

1. To the saints beneath the altar ‘that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course’ Revelation 6:11.

2. Following the casting down of Satan, He said, ‘he [the devil] knowing that he hath but a short time’ Revelation 12:12.

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These expressions of a period of time, the three and a half years of persecution, the ‘little time’ of the martyrs, and the ‘short time’ of Satan are the same and are now fulfilled. The Roman persecution as it backed paganism is at an end; the devil is cast into the abyss, no longer to deceive the nations as once he did; the saints’ death for the Word of God is avenged and vindicated as they now sit upon thrones, reigning with Christ.”

4. Do you think the thousand years is to be taken literally, or as a complete but undetermined period? Verse 3.

This number is a complete number which stands for an undetermined but full period of time. We are not expected to take this number literally, just as we have not taken other numbers in the book literally. It is somewhat unfortunate that most people look at this passage and place all the focus on this thousand-year period. The focus of the passage is not on this period of time, but rather on the binding of Satan. There are many false ideas and views which spring up concerning the millennium which completely miss the point of the passage. Rather than spending all our time examining these viewpoints, I have prepared some material which summarizes and explains the main views on the millennium for you to study further. It is worth familiarizing yourself with the basic concepts of these views along with their flaws, but I think the questions Johnny asks over this chapter are more worthy of our time as the things he addresses focus on the theme of the chapter. Perhaps a deeper study of millennial views can be done on another occasion or in your own personal studies. I will share with you a very basic summary of the three main views as given by G. K. Beale in his commentary:

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“There are three predominant views of the millennium, though within each perspective there are wide variations of interpretation that cannot be cataloged here. (1) Some believe that the millennium will occur after the second coming of Christ. This view is traditionally known as Premillennialism. (2) Postmillennialism has held that the millennium occurs toward the end of the church age and that Christ’s climactic coming will occur at the close of the millennium.

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(3) Others believe that the millennium started at Christ’s resurrection and will be concluded at his final coming. This view has been called Amillennialism, though it is better to call it, more simply, ‘Inaugurated Millennialism’ since ‘Amillennial’ is vaguer. (The amillennialist believes that the Kingdom of God was inaugurated at Christ’s resurrection, hence the term “Inaugurated Millennialism”) Postmillennialism and Amillennialism have approached the passage more consistently according to a symbolic interpretation.”

Again, if you would like to study these in more depth, I have provided some materials for you here and on the website.

5. Who are those who lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years and what is their judgment? Verse 4.

John says he saw the souls, not bodies of two groups: 1. The souls of “them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God.” These are martyrs who offered their lives in sacrifice. 2. Those who did not “worship the beast, his image, and did not receive his mark on their forehead or hand”. John in his vision saw these souls sitting upon thrones and sharing in Christ’s rule of victory. This would not exclude all the faithful who have lived since John’s time in sharing in that reign as we see in the scriptures:

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Romans 5:17 - For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

The judgment of these souls is what was enacted against Satan on behalf of the saints. We saw in previous chapters how such a judgment was executed on their behalf against the harlot in her being burned with fire Revelation 18. Judgement is also executed against the beast and the false prophet as they in turn are cast into the lake of fire Revelation 19:20. Now judgment is made upon the Dragon as he is cast into the abyss and put in chains. These all were vicious and relentless enemies of the Church and so now on behalf of the saints, judgments are carried out against them.

6. Does John see bodies of those beheaded for the witness of Jesus? Verse 4.

No, he saw their souls. A specification is made here so that we understand the concept of the “first resurrection” which is about to be introduced is not a physical resurrection. It is not the resurrection at the last day but instead seems to be one we are to understand symbolically. We will talk a bit more about this with the next question.

7. Do you think “the rest of the dead” refers to the dead awaiting a bodily resurrection or those martyred in the war against the beast and paganism in a resurrection of a cause? Verse 5.

This question gave me some trouble, as depending on how you understand the “first resurrection” and the other implied resurrections in this passage you can get into some confusing territory. I think the second option is possibly the best answer I can give for this question. Homer Hailey, in his commentary says:

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“It seems clear that those expositors err who find in either verses 3-4 a resurrection of the body. The vision portrays the victory of the martyrs underneath the altar, whose “little time” is finished, whose cry has been answered, and whose victory is symbolized as a resurrection and as being seated on thrones. Christ’s victory was manifested and exemplified in His resurrection and His being seated on His throne which stands as a symbol of His total triumph. The figure is not new; Old Testament prophets pictured Judah and Israel’s triumph over idolatry and Assyrian and Babylonian captivity as a resurrection, a return from the dead (Isaiah 26:19m Hosea 13:14, Ezekiel 37:1-14).

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‘The rest of the dead’ who live not until the thousand years are finished are not awaiting a bodily resurrection. As the cause for which the martyrs had died is symbolized by a resurrection, so ‘the rest,’ those killed with the sword of Christ in their war on behalf of the beast and paganism (Revelation 19:21), shall experience a resurrection of their cause in the revived effort of Satan which will come toward the end of time through new allies, Gog and Magog.”

It seems necessary that we understand the “first resurrection” as symbolic of something, especially with the implied second resurrection of the enemies of God. Neither of these refer to the general resurrection at judgment day which is implied in Revelation 20:11-15. If these first two resurrections were literal, you would have a very difficult time harmonizing what purpose these resurrections could serve. On the other hand if Hailey, and others who explain these resurrections as symbolic are correct, then we can see the meaning of the picture before us. Pieters in his commentary has a very similar explanation to Hailey’s. He says:

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“The ‘first resurrection’ and the reigning with Christ, in this view (Preterist), just as in that of the post-millenarians, represent the triumph of the principles for which the martyrs gave their lives. Hence it is an actual resurrection in the picture, but this symbolizes the revival of those things for which they stood. Thus the ‘first resurrection’ is strictly limited, as in the text, to those who remained faithful in the conflict with the Beast. Understood to be the pagan persecuting power of the Roman Empire…

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In Swete’s interpretation the expression ‘the rest of the dead’ does not stand in contrast with the ‘first resurrection,’ as the text evidently intends it to do. If the second resurrection is the general resurrection of all men at the last day, the saints and martyrs have part in it, and it forms no antithesis to them. The meaning of both groups, those intended here as participating in the ‘first resurrection’ and those called, by contrast, ‘the rest of the dead,’ becomes intelligible if we transfer ourselves in thought to the days of the apostle John, and remember that he was thinking in terms of himself and the men of his generation. There were then, in the Roman Empire, in his eyes, and in those of his fellow Christians, just two classes of men, those siding with the Beast, and those standing out against him (the Beast).

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In the course of time both classes passed away from the land of the living, and formed ‘the dead,’ that is, not all the dead of all generations, but the dead of that time. Of them all, the martyrs and confessors would (symbolically) come to life again when the Christian religion triumphed: the rest would not have such a revival so long as that triumph lasted (the thousand years) but would likewise (symbolically) revive when the final conflict should come. This seems to me the best interpretation. So understood, neither the first resurrection nor the second has anything to do with the mass of mankind or with the general resurrection at the last day.” - Pieters

I hope that these excerpts help. The concepts of these symbolic resurrections are a little hard to grasp, especially if you’re hearing this sort of explanation for the first time. I think this was one of the more difficult sections for me and I would welcome anyone’s thoughts on this after services.

8. What are the three rewards for those who have part in the first resurrection? Verse 6.

This is the fifth of seven “blessed” statements given in the book of Revelation. This verse proclaims the wonderful completeness and heavenly joy previously expressed in Revelation 14:13 and adds to it that these people are now completely and finally separated from sin, they are holy. This proclamation has these three rewards along with it:

1. The second death has no power over them.

2. They shall be priests of God and of Christ.

3. They shall reign with Christ for the thousand years.

The Defeat of Satan - Revelation 20:7-10

9. What happens at the end of the thousand years? Verse 7.

10. Did Satan’s stay in prison reform him? Verse 8.

11. To whom or what do Gog and Magog refer? Verse 8.

12. How extensive is Satan’s deception, according to verse 8?

14. Does this last enemy prevail against the saints? Verse 9.

Satan will be released from his prison. Though set free, his disposition toward Christ and His people has no change. Immediately he sets about the same work as before, calling together new allies who greatly resemble his former allies now deceased. Again, we are not given much information on what his loosing means for the world, just as with his binding. However, we can know that his ability to deceive the nations once more seems to be restored to him. His influence is worldwide once more, extending to the “four corners” of the earth. He calls new allies Gog and Magog, which in this context refers to the people and nations from all over the world who take the side of the Devil and stand in opposition to the Lord and His church.

The names Gog and Magog come from the Old Testament and refer to a man named Gog who is a descendent of the prophet Joel 1 Chronicles 5:4. He is the chief prince of the tribes of Meshech and Tubal in the land named Magog and is recorded as gathering a great host to come challenge the land of Israel. Ezekiel 38-39 discuss Gog at some length and Ezekiel 38:16 is particularly relevant to the picture presented here in Revelation 20.

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Ezekiel 38:16 - You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes.

Throughout these chapters, judgment is pronounced on Gog and Magog who set themselves against the Lord’s people. Their destruction is described in detail and so these are fitting names for the new allies which the Devil calls forth for himself. These new allies meet the same fate as their namesakes and that of their predecessors. They meet with ultimate and complete destruction. Verse 9 says that fire will come down from Heaven and devour them. This parallels what is recorded in:

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Ezekiel 39:1-6 - And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; and I will turn you around and lead you on, bringing you up from the far north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel. Then I will knock the bow out of your left hand, and cause the arrows to fall out of your right hand. You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken,” says the Lord God. “And I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in security in the coastlands. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.

13. What Old Testament event is like the imagery of verse 9? (Hint: A mighty empire sent a besieging army to Jerusalem. It’s in 2 Kings)

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2 Kings 1:9-14 - Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. So he went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill. And he spoke to him: “Man of God, the king has said, ‘Come down!’” So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, “If I *am* a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.” And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. Then he sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty men. And he answered and said to him: “Man of God, thus has the king said, ‘Come down quickly!’”

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So Elijah answered and said to them, “If I *am* a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.” And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. Again, he sent a third captain of fifty with his fifty men. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and pleaded with him, and said to him: “Man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight. Look, fire has come down from heaven and burned up the first two captains of fifties with their fifties. But let my life now be precious in your sight.”

The destruction of Gog and Magog shares similarities with both this account of the confrontation between Elijah and Ahaziah and the passages we noticed of Gog’s attempt at conquering the land of Israel.

15. How long is the torment of Satan, the beast, and the false prophet? Verse 10.

It is eternal, forever and ever. Their punishment reflects their rebellion: It is absolute and permanent. There is no mercy for these persistent forces of rebellion and wickedness. Hailey in his commentary made an interesting note about the downfall of Satan saying:

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“First, he was cast down to the earth (Revelation 12:9), then into the pit of the abyss (Revelation 20:3), and now into the lake of fire and brimstone, his ultimate end. His destruction has been gradual, but long-since determined in the mind of God, for the lake was prepared for him and his own (Matthew 25:41, 46).”

There are many who try to dismiss or re-interpret the eternal duration of punishment for Satan and the wicked. However, to deny this fact requires you to explain away plain biblical teaching on the matter. Jesus said that at judgment those who were unfaithful on His left hand would be told,

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“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels… And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:41, 46. Both the punishment and the reward of life are eternal, which has been taught previously in Revelation. Revelation 7:15 says that those before the throne “serve him day and night”. In Revelation 14:11 the wicked “have no rest day or night” and that with the devil they are tormented Matthew 25:41, 46. The use of the phrase “day and night” in these passages means forever and ever.

The Great White Throne - Revelation 20:11-15.

16. Is it possible to escape God’s judgment? Verse 11.

No, there is no place which can be found in which to flee from God. Heaven and earth will pass away, something which has been consistently foretold in the scriptures.

17. Does verse 12 show that there will be a resurrection of the dead, whether righteous or unrighteous?

Yes, the scene presented here presupposes the resurrection of all people who have lived and died from Adam until the end of time. The scriptures affirm that there would be such a resurrection in John 5:28 and Acts 24:15 so it must logically occur prior to this scene before the Great White Throne.

18. What does verse 12 say against the false denominational doctrine of “Faith Only”?

19. What are the books that are opened? Verse 12.

The dead were judged according to the records of their works. If faith alone saves without works, there would be no need for such a record. The very opposite picture is presented to us here in verse 12 that what we do in this life matters in eternity. The books stand for the omniscience of God the Judge. To Him nothing is unknown and by Him nothing is forgotten except such as what is His will to forget Hebrews 8:12.

20. Will there be any place to hide, according to verse 13?

No, just as there was no place in the heaven or the earth in verse 11 there is no escape in the sea, in Death, or in Hades. All living and all dead will stand before God to be judged.

21. If this eternal casting away is the second death, what is the first? Verse 14.

Physical death.

22. Who besides the harlot, the beast, the false prophet, and Satan are cast into the lake of fire? Verse 15.

Anyone not found written in the Book of Life. These are those whose works in the other books condemned them as they were not faithful to God.

23. What is the book of life and how important is it to have one’s name written in it? Verse 15.

It is the record of all who have been faithful to God and have obeyed His commandments all their lives. Only those written in the book will make their home in Heaven for eternity with God. From all that we have seen and studied in the book of Revelation and particularly in the last few chapters, there is nothing more important than faithful obedience to God so that in the end your name will be recorded in the book of eternal life.

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On that final day everyone will rise. There will be nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. All our deeds will be known to God and by them we will be judged. There is no middle ground, on two sides on which to stand: Christ’s and the Devil’s. We will face the great white throne of the Lord and hear either commendation or condemnation. It’s hard not to hear the words of Joshua when he said, “Choose this day who you will serve”. That’s the question we face as we read this passage: Who’s side are you on? Are you serving the Lord or are you serving the Dragon? If you are not on the Lord’s side, come to Him today. Confess your belief that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of your life against God, and be baptized, washed in the cleansing blood of the Lord. If you are already a child of God, make your life right with Him if something is amiss. If you still choose not to obey God, no matter how big or small the thing might be which stands between you and Him, read this chapter again and consider your standing with God. If your name is not written in the book of life, you are in the gravest of danger. The call of Christ is to salvation, it is simple, beautiful, and free. If you’re ready to make your life right with God, we will gladly assist you, so come forward as we sing.