

## **Saint Paul Lutheran Church, Sunday Morning Bible Class**

### **Book of Revelation, Chapter 20 Notes and Questions**

#### **Introductory Comments:**

- One of the biggest challenges in interpreting Revelation 20 is determining whether or not it follows chapter 19 chronologically. The two beasts are thrown into the lake of fire in 19:20-21, and many commentators see chapter 20 as a continuation of the judgment, in which the dragon, Satan, is cast into the lake of fire. It is easy to understand the confusion, for it is difficult to understand the cyclical nature of Revelation. But, that is what is going on here. Chapter 20 is not a continuation of 19, but rather shows another depiction of Satan's doom (the two beasts were manifestations of Satan and thus, when they're thrown into the lake of fire, it is Satan who is thrown in). Thus, when we get to 20:1, we are beginning with the casting out of Satan from heaven (Rev. 12), which is depicted as being bound and thrown into the Abyss. Then, we get a look at the entire NT era, in which the saints rule with Christ for "1000 years." Then, we see Satan's release (short season) just before the Parousia and, finally, his ultimate judgment (thrown into lake of fire). Thus, what we see in Chapter 20 is a picture from the crucifixion to the Second Coming.
- We have to interpret chapter 20 in light of clearer Scripture. There is no other text in the NT that talks about a dual physical resurrection, nor is there any other text that talks about an actual earthly reign of Christ before the final resurrection. If we look at chapter 20 independently, we will inevitably misinterpret it. This is the mistake of dispensationalists, who start with this text and then use it as a template to interpret other biblical texts (like 2 Thess. 4; Dan. 9, etc.). The only way to understand this text is to interpret it in light of clearer texts, allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture.

#### **Rev. 20:1-3**

- "And I saw an Angel coming down from heaven having the key of the Abyss, etc." – This Angel, again, is Christ. First, this Angel has the key to the Abyss, which is the same thing as having the key to death and hades (1:18), which Christ says of Himself. Also, Christ has the power and authority to bind Satan. He speaks of binding Satan in Matt. 12:25-29, where He binds the "strong man." Confer also, John 12:31, where Christ speaks of the "ruler of this world" being cast out as a result of His ministry and crucifixion.
- "And He seized the dragon . . . and bound him for a thousand years" - The binding of Satan takes place during Christ's ministry, and ultimately, at His crucifixion and Resurrection. Some object because they look at the world and see that Satan still has so much influence in it. But, this binding is not a total destruction of Satan. He still has power, but is bound from preventing the Gospel from going forth throughout the world, and from entering the throne room in heaven to accuse sinners before God. He is like a chained dog, who will bite you if you come into his sphere, but cannot harm you as long as you stay out of reach. Since Christ's crucifixion and Resurrection, "one little word can fell" Satan. He is judged and cannot harm us, unless we fall under his sphere of influence by entering his world of evil. We have a beautiful and comforting picture of the extent to which Christ's work has bound Satan in this passage.
- "1000 years" – We have seen many symbolic numbers throughout Revelation (144,000, 42 months, 3 ½ years, 1260 days, etc.), so how can we possibly take this number literally? To do so would be simply absurd! It is symbolic of the complete New Testament era, from Christ's First Coming until shortly before His Second Coming. Those who take the "1000 years" literally and look for a future earthly reign of Christ are denying the fact that Christ has already established His Kingdom. Each time a person is converted, he begins his reign with Christ.
- "It is necessary" for Satan to be loosed after the 1000 years for a short time – this is of divine

necessity; God must loose Satan before He brings about His final judgment. Why? We can't say for sure, since God doesn't reveal His reasons for this, but perhaps it is to assure that there will be no grounds to question His justice on Judgment Day. Satan will not be able to cry "foul" on that Day, for He will have been unbound for a time to pursue his evil desires. Whatever the case, this unbinding of Satan is the "little season" we have seen referenced many times in Revelation. Satan will once again have the ability to stifle the Gospel from going forth, and will have access to the heavenly throne room to accuse the saints. As we have discussed often, it is during this "little season" when Satan will manifest himself through the End-time Antichrist and bring his final assault upon Christ and His Church. There will be a great apostasy during this time and many will fall away from the Truth. The true Christian Church on earth will be very hard to find, for the majority of those who claim to be Christians will actually belong to the false church of the Antichrist. They will be deceived by the many false teachers Satan raises up and believe their false teachings. This is the time St. Paul warns us about: "The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). The fact that we already see this occurring before our very eyes today with the plethora of false teachers out there means that it is very possible that we are already in Satan's "little season." Of course, we can't say that with certainty, but the great apostasy we see happening today should serve to awaken us to this possibility and, thus, lead us to repentance and faith, clinging steadfast to the truth of God's Word.

Why wasn't Satan bound earlier in history?

Where is "*the abyss*"?

Why is Satan's most popular name in Revelation "*the dragon*"?

What happens to the dragon?

Is this "binding" literal?

If Satan has been bound, how can he be prowling around like a lion (1 Peter 5:8)?

What is Satan's most frequent ploy?

How does Satan deceive you?

Why is Satan not permanently bound or cast directly into the lake of fire?

Why is it necessary for him to once again be released?

### Rev. 20:4-6

- “They lived and reigned with Christ for 1000 years” – refers to all saints throughout the NT era, who live (have New Life; regeneration) and reign (share Christ’s rule) with Christ. When believers are converted, they are brought to life and they live on after death and will live forever. We reign with Christ already now and will reign with Him forever in His Kingdom to come.
- First resurrection = conversion (not a reference to a physical resurrection) (cf. John 5); Second resurrection = bodily resurrection of all people on the Last Day.
- First death = original sin (according to some) or physical death (according to most); Second death= eternal death. Everyone is born spiritually dead, but those who are brought to faith through the Gospel by the Holy Spirit, are born again from above and made alive in Christ. For these, the “second death” has no power over them. The second death is total separation from God and includes everlasting punishment. It is much, much worse than the first death, for people live under God’s providential care while on this earth. But, if they die in unbelief, they will experience complete death. They will be raised on the Last Day and see what true life is, but they will not be permitted to experience it. They will be cast into Hell bodily forever.

Who are the mysterious “*they*” that reign with Christ during this thousand-year reign?

Who are “*the rest of the dead*” that did not come to life until the end of the thousand years?

What is the difference between the first and second resurrections (20:5-6)?

And what is the difference between the first and second deaths?

### Rev. 20:7-10

- In these verses, we receive a summary of the final battle Satan will unleash upon Christ’s Church just prior to Christ’s Second Coming. “Gog and Magog” are *not* literal nations! They represent all the pagan nations of the earth that Satan will raise up in opposition against the Church (cf. Ezek. 38 and 39, where “Gog and Magog” represent the archenemies of Israel). What we have depicted here is another picture of the battle of Armageddon (cf. Rev. 16:16), in which Satan gathers his army for the final assault on Christ’s Church.
- “. . . fire came down from heaven and consumed them” – The devil’s final assault is a complete failure. His army is destroyed and thrown into the “lake of fire.” So is Satan. The defeat he suffered at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ will finally come to fruition. He will finally receive the eternal punishment he deserves, as he, and all the evil angels and unbelievers of all time, “will be tormented day and night forever.”

In 20:2-7, “*thousand years*” is used six times. Should this be understood literally or figuratively? Why?

Why does God release Satan from the Abyss (20:7)?

Satan is successful in his attempt to “*deceive the nations.*” What does this tell us about the nature of man?

What is the duration of the lake of fire?

Are individuals ever annihilated?

### **Rev. 20:11-15**

- “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it” – This is a picture of the Final Judgment, when Christ returns in great glory with all His holy angels (cf. Matt. 24:29-31). All people will appear before Christ on that great and dreadful Day. Those who have died will be resurrected, both unbelievers and believers. Their spirits, which have been residing in either heaven or hell, will be reunited with the bodies they had while living on earth. Those who are living will appear in their bodies before the throne of Christ. Believers have the promise that their resurrected bodies (or “changed” bodies, if they are alive when Christ returns) will be glorified and perfect (cf. 1 Cor. 15 – The Great Resurrection Chapter). Unbelievers will go into eternity in their corruptible bodies.
- “. . . books were opened . . . the Book of Life” – the opening of the books signifies God’s omniscience. He knows all things. He knows who will enter the Paradise of His Eternal Kingdom and who will be thrown in the “lake of fire.” Furthermore, He has the evidence; the documentation. And, this documentation reveals all who belong to Him, and all who do not belong to Him. That the Judgment is pronounced upon each person “according to what they had done” must be understood in relation to faith. It is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that we are declared righteous (cf. Rom. 3:28). We cannot merit this grace by our works. But, the Final Judgment is based on works. It is not merely arbitrary. There will be no cause for complaint or appeal, for it will be shown to all what each person has done. Believers, since they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and forgiven of all sins, have no bad works to be put on display. Only the good work that they have done, or rather that Christ has done through them, will be revealed. Unbelievers, on the other hand, have absolutely no good works. Even the most civilly decent among them, those who may have accomplished many wonderful and charitable works while living on earth, have no good works, for all their works are tainted with sin. Thus, they only have bad works put on display on that Day. So, in the end, the Final Judgment is actually based on whether or not people believed in Jesus Christ, since their works are completely dependent upon that.
- What a Grand Scene this will be! When Christ appears in great glory upon His throne, “the earth and sky will flee away from His presence.” The old order of things will pass away to make way for the New Heavens and New Earth. We cannot even begin to fathom what all of this will look like. I’ve had people ask me, “How will all people be able to see Christ coming on the clouds at the same time?” People ask such questions because they can’t wrap their minds around how people living on opposite sides of the globe can witness this event at the same time. Well, here we’re given the answer – the earth and sky will flee away! As Christ returns in great glory upon the clouds, the cosmos will simultaneously change in such a way that all people will witness His Coming and will be gathered before His great white throne. What a Grand Scene, indeed!
- The Final Judgment having occurred and the devil, his minions, and all unbelievers having been cast into the eternal “lake of fire,” the last two chapters of Revelation deal exclusively with the Eternal Kingdom, where all believers will dwell with the Lord in Paradise.

Who is sitting on the “great white throne”?

What is significant about the adjectives “*great*” and “*white*”?

What characteristic of God does this throne speak to?

From your perspective, does it ever look like the throne is unoccupied-that life on planet earth is running recklessly out of control?

When did God's providence become more than an abstract theological concept for you?

When has God come through for you when life was a bit of a mess?

Who are the dead who are judged?

How are the dead judged?

Is there a difference between the great white throne judgment and the judgment seat of Christ?