

This chapter covers the time span between Christ's return to earth and the creation of the new heavens and earth. It describes how God deals with Satan before and after Christ's millennial kingdom as well as the role of the saints during the millennium. John also witnesses the final judgment of Satan as well as the unredeemed of humanity who rejected faith in Christ.

¹ And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

After judging the beast and the Antichrist, attention is now turned to Satan as God sends an angel to bind Satan. It's possible this angel may be the same one that John saw in **Rev. 9:1-2** at the sounding of the fifth trumpet: *"¹ And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. ² And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit."* That angel releases the plague of demonic locusts on the earth as the fifth trumpet judgment. This angel in chapter 20 has been given custody of the key to the bottomless pit (the abyss) which is a place of confinement for fallen angels and he also is carrying a "great chain."

² And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

John uses four titles to identify who is being bound so that there will be no doubt as to his identity. He is described as a dragon, indicating his viciousness. "That old serpent" points back to the garden of Eden where Satan originally tempted Adam and Eve to sin. He is also called "the Devil" ("slanderer" in Greek) and "Satan" ("adversary" in Greek). John wants us to know that it is the enemy of God's people that is being bound. The angel binds Satan for a thousand years.

³ And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

"And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him" - The bottomless pit is not hell or the lake of fire. It is a place of confinement for fallen angels awaiting judgment. The angel casts Satan into the pit, locks it ("shut him up") and puts a seal upon him signifying that only the authority of God can release him.

"that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled" - Satan has had more influence over the government of nations than we probably would like to believe. Through deceit he has directed leaders in ungodly directions through the centuries even until today. He has also influenced (either personally or through his demonic minions) the individual citizens of these nations over the centuries to sin and rebel against God. However, at Christ's return he will be bound and prevented from influencing the nations through his deceit during the thousand year reign of Christ on earth.

"and after that he must [necessary] be loosed a little season" - Satan will not escape at the end of the thousand years but will be released for a short period of time. The text says "he must be loosed" meaning that it will be necessary to release Satan in order to fulfill a purpose that God has. God has allowed Satan to roam the earth after the garden of Eden, continuing to spread his evil influence on the earth in order to fulfill the purposes of God. Satan will again be released to roam the earth to fulfill God's purposes once again. We can only speculate on God's purpose here. Perhaps it is to demonstrate once again the inherent sinfulness of the human heart which becomes apparent in vs. 7-9 when Satan is released to again deceive the nations.

⁴ And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them" - John does not specifically identify who is sitting on these thrones or how many there are other than to say that they were given the authority to judge. There are multiple scriptures indicating that saints of God will reign with Christ. Daniel saw Christ defeating the Antichrist and establishing His kingdom on earth with His saints judging its citizens: Dan. 7:21-22 *"²¹ I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; ²² Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom."* Jesus told the disciples they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28) and the Apostle Paul indicated that the Corinthians would be among those who would judge the world and angels (1 Cor. 6:2-3).

"and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus..." - These souls appear to be those who have died during the tribulation because John specifically states that they had refused to worship the beast, his image or to take his mark. They stood for the word of God even when it meant their deaths. The Greek word for beheading was a general term for execution so it may be that these souls had been executed through various means. That being said, I find it interesting that beheading seems to be the favorite means of execution for Muslim extremists.

"and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" - These souls that died for Christ during the tribulation will be resurrected and also given authority in Christ's kingdom.

⁵ But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" - All of the saints from both the OT and NT have already been resurrected to take part in the millennial kingdom. The "rest of the dead" are the rest of humanity who never expressed faith in God but rebelled against Him. John draws a distinction between the saints who have already been resurrected and the rest of humanity who are not raised again until after the millennial kingdom.

"This is the first resurrection" - John categorizes the saints resurrected before the millennial kingdom under the title of "the first resurrection." This is a category of blessing, as we see in the next verse.

⁶ Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection” - The saints that take part in the first resurrection are in a position of blessing and have been made holy by the blood of Christ. The fact that they belong to Christ is the reason they are able to take part in the first resurrection.

“on such the second death hath no power” - Verses 13, 14 tell us that the second death is the result of standing before God and being judged for your own works. No one standing at that judgment will escape condemnation but all will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented eternally. Those who take part in the first resurrection will have already had their sins judged on the cross and so will not have to be judged personally and undergo the second death.

“but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” - Instead of judgment these saints of the first resurrection will be exalted and receive the promises and privileges of the kingdom.

⁷ And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, ⁸ And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison” - Why would God release Satan once again? Apparently to do what Satan always does: deceive people into rebellion against God’s will. Perhaps God’s purpose is to expose those who have been born during the millennial kingdom but have not been born-again. Their rebellion under Satan’s influence will be evidence that they have not been redeemed.

“And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog” - Satan will gather those evidently born during the millennial kingdom but have not come to personal faith in God. He will rally their rebellious hearts and incite an organized rebellion against Jesus Christ and His leadership. Gog and Magog seem to be a reference to an invasion of the promised land predicted in Ezekiel 38, although it’s not clear if this is the same event.

“to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea” - Satan will gather a huge number of people from all over the earth and bring them together in an effort to forcibly overthrow the reign of Christ. Despite there being 1,000 years of benevolence and peace under Christ’s rule, there will be embers of rebellion in these peoples heart that Satan will fan into the flames of a revolution against God.

⁹ And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

“And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city” - The vast army of rebels, incited by Satan, will surround Jerusalem and any nearby settlements of saints with the apparent intention of attacking the capital city and overthrowing Christ. The fact they are surrounding the saints indicates that the rebels are not saints themselves.

“and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them” - God will make a swift and permanent end to the rebellion.

“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are” - Verses 1-3 of this chapter describe an angel casting Satan into the bottomless pit. This task will be repeated (possibly by the same angel) except that this time Satan is cast permanently into the lake of fire. Notice the phrase “where the beast and the false prophet are.” After 1,000 years the beast and the false prophet are still there, which contradicts the teaching of annihilationism which says that the lake of fire is not permanent because those cast into it are destroyed and cease to exist.

“and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” - Their torment will be conscious and eternal.

¹¹ And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it” - This is the “great white throne judgment” where the unbelieving dead will stand before God and be judged according to their works. They did not trust Christ’s provision for their sin on the cross and so they must bear their sins themselves. There is no such thing as a “general judgment” where all will stand to determine if they will go to heaven or hell. No redeemed person will stand before the white throne judgment because they were part of the first resurrection (v. 6).

“from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” - This may be when the current physical universe ceases to exist to make way for the new heavens and new earth. One commentator said this is the time that Peter wrote about when “the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Peter 3:10-13).

“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened...” - All unbelievers will stand before God and be judged according to their works which are recorded in “the books.” Their works will condemn them. Also, “another book” was opened (the book of life), apparently to show that these dead are not recorded in the book of life.

¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. ¹⁴ And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

No one will be omitted or skipped over. Unbelievers will not even be able to hide from the judgment in hell but will have to face God. Those not found in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire, which John designates as “the second death.” The first death is the death of our physical bodies. The second death will be a spiritual death of eternal torment and separation from God in the lake of fire.