# Revelation 20—Reigning with Christ

Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, October 18 at Pe Ell and October 21, 2020 at Cedar Park

Knowing that everything will work out fine is a great comfort and encouragement as you go through the process. Throughout this book John has been assured of a great outcome by being shown the future. Take courage now, no matter what the circumstance, because Christ will rule peaceably over all the earth and we will reign with him. Not only that but the devil will get his due. Here is how the Bible reads:

*1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.*

Let’s look at some of the components first. An angel comes down with a key to the *abussos* (ab'-us-sos), here translated as the Abyss. Sometimes it is called the bottomless pit. This place is clearly not a vacation resort. When Jesus cast the demons out of “Legion” this was the one place they did not want to go.[[1]](#footnote-1) On the other hand, it has connections to the place where Christ went at the time of his death.

*"Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)*.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The angel is armed with a chain for an unstated purpose, but presumably designed to accompany the key in locking the devil in his holding tank. In Jude 1:6 we have a similar treatment of the fallen angels, “*And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home-- these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day*.”

By whatever means the devil is bound for 1,000 years. This is the one place where the devil is said to be bound. Nowhere else in the Bible is either Satan or the Devil spoken of as being subject to binding. (For a biblical and historical understanding of binding and loosing, see my article at http://www.cedarpark.org/docs/books/paper/binding.pdf )

We are interested in the synonyms that are used in this passage. There are four used. From this we can determine that the serpent, dragon, devil, and Satan are one and the same. A passage like this, with four synonyms, is very useful is establishing connections between this verse and other verses in describing spiritual entities.[[3]](#footnote-3)

I imagine a Christian world with no devil around to lead people astray. Even before his first encounter with Eve and Adam, the devil had been a deceiver of the angels in heaven. Since then, he has been deceiving the nations. He will continue to do this until the moment envisioned by this verse arrives. Only when the Abyss is occupied, locked, and sealed will there be peace among the nations. The devil loves deception, war, killing, famine, and destruction. His removal from the scene is a key factor in the thousand years of peace.

No more “accuser of the brethren” who grinds your guilt into self-loathing. No more robbing children of their innocence and childhood. No more killing of youth through drugs, alcohol, and despair. No more destroying homes and hope. All the devil does is rob, kill, and destroy and his day is coming to an end. Think of the monstrous tragedy of the devil’s lies around abortion.

I remember the pierced Bibles that showed up on our church front door as someone tried to put a curse on the church. That didn’t work because God was watching over us. This passage reminds us that not only the attacks but the devil himself will be bound for a thousand years. The devil goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour but Jesus is like a hunter from Pe Ell and that roaring lion is going down, down, down and the chain will follow.

## The Thousand Year Reign of Christ

*4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years*.

I am inclined to let the Bible be the Bible and for it to say what it says. So when it says that Christ will reign for a thousand years, I tend to accept it at face value. One thousand years could simply mean a very long time but there is also no reason to make it merely symbolic. Justin Martyr, who was born about the time the Apostle John died, said it well.

*“But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged, [as] the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare*.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Justin Martyr in Chapter 81 said quite explicitly “*And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place. Just as our Lord also said, 'They shall neither marry nor be given in marriage, but shall be equal to the angels, the children of the God of the resurrection.*'”[[5]](#footnote-5) Papias also took the Millennial path.[[6]](#footnote-6)

However, when Augustine was born Christianity was already well established and governing the Roman Empire.[[7]](#footnote-7) He changed a number of the prevailing biblical ideas including adopting the idea that the 1,000 years began with Christ and that Satan was also bound at that time and could no longer prevent people from being saved*. “Now the devil was thus bound not only when the Church began to be more and more widely extended among the nations beyond Judea, but is now and shall be bound till the end of the world, when he is to be loosed.”[[8]](#footnote-8)* For the last thousand years or so time has not been too favorable to Augustine’s view on this matter.

In Revelation we see a lot of the four kingdoms beginning with Babylon just as Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. But I have another criticism of Augustine. He changed the terminology of history away from Daniel’s wording to describing history like the aging of a man. I never understood why he did that until I put it together with his view that the rule of Christ began with his first coming and took place through the governance of the church on the earth. Without Augustine’s misdirection is how he labeled history, we would have an easier time understanding the terminology of Revelation.

This is such a great chapter of the Bible, no wonder so many sermons have been preached on it for these last 2,000 years. The greatest prophetic figures of church history have all taken it to heart and applied its ideas to their era. I might not agree with each one on their specific interpretation of the scripture, but I appreciate that they were applying the scripture as best they could to their generation. Bottom line, we reign with Christ. Some “Jesus followers” don’t want to follow the Jesus of Revelation. They prefer to limit it to the Jesus of Matthew who turns the other cheek. I say we will reign with Christ one day so we might as well get started teaching the nations to obey everything he was commanded us.

John sees the thrones of authority to judge. We will learn more about these in a moment. Here he mainly identifies the results of the first resurrection. In my understanding of eschatology, the rapture has already taken place. The Great Tribulation is coming to an end. There were those who had resisted the beast, refusing the mark. They had testified of Jesus and acknowledged the Word of God. Because of this, they were beheaded. However, they come back to life at some moment that is not precisely specified. Their resistive behavior and means of death are rather specific. It is clear this is not the general group of believers. These are special martyrs of the Tribulation period. Their resurrection is contrasted with “the rest of the dead,” presumably those who die in the Revelation period, who remain dead until after the 1,000 year rule of Christ.

The only difficulty is the term that John applies to this resurrection. He calls it the first resurrection. In what sense is it the first resurrection? We presume this is not the time spoken of by Paul in First Thessalonians. *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*”[[9]](#footnote-9) We think of this as the first resurrection.

Paul does not assign numbers to the First Thessalonians resurrection. He does describe the sequence of that resurrection. First the dead rise, followed by the catching up of those who are alive and remain. In what Paul describes, all the dead in Christ rise. John sees only those who have been beheaded for specific beast-resisting behaviors. Paul sees those who are raised from the dead going into the air to meet the Lord and to be with him. John sees those who are raised as staying on the earth. From this we conclude that these resurrections are two different resurrections. If we understand correctly that Paul’s resurrection takes place seven years before John’s, then how can John’s resurrection be called the first[[10]](#footnote-10) resurrection? It helps is we understand “first” as being the “best.”

John’s discussion here seems to be focused exclusively on this sequence of events that he is relating. He apparently is not reaching back to include the resurrection of the dead that Paul describes. Rather, he focuses on the resurrections in view in this telling of the end time events. There are those who rise before the 1,000 years and there are those who rise after the 1,000 years. Those before are not subject to the second death. Those afterwards will rise only to fall. One resurrection is clearly superior to the other. In fact, John’s choice of words seems to contrast the first resurrection with the second death. Those in the best resurrection will not die. Instead, “*they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years*.” Those in the other resurrection will experience a fate worse than death. They will experience the second death.

## The Final Battle Over Jerusalem

*7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth-- Gog and Magog-- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them*.

The thousand years of peace pass quickly in John’s telling. He is not emphasizing the beauty of the peace but the passing of the inflictor of pain. Satan gets his last opportunity to deceive the nations. In a world without injustice, poverty, hunger, racism, sexism, or any other social wrong, there will still be an infinite number of people willing to go against God. If such is the case, we should understand that most social problems have a spiritual root rather than material. When politicians say they will solve various problems by more education, more money, or less discrimination they are probably missing a real understanding of spiritual reality.

The same spirit that is motivating the present assault on the very existence of Jerusalem will be let loose on the world again. They will surround the city of Jerusalem one more time. They are doing it now. They will be doing it when Jesus returns the next time, and they will try it at the very last. They will come against the city that God loves. Indeed, it will be the city from which Christ himself will be ruling the world in peace. There is just something about the devil that hates God’s people and the holy city of Jerusalem. A good way to assess the spirituality of a person is the degree to which they love Jerusalem. (Christian politicians will do well to remember that God’s people will ultimately be hated, no matter how well they rule. If people will rebel against Jesus, they will rebel against anyone.)

Apparently, Jesus is going to have very little patience with this last rebellion. They will be there, surrounding the city. It will seem like another great confrontation. All the news cameras will be there to see this great battle. But, like Indiana Jones in the Last Crusade, the sword wielding attackers are dispatched without a moment’s thought. Fire comes from heaven and they are gone. It’s just that quick.

## The End of the Devil

*10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur,[[11]](#footnote-11) where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*.

The dead of all types are resurrected are here seen standing before the great white throne of God. The books are opened. There is more than one kind of book, one of which is the book of life. Each person was judged according to what they had done. Those whose names were not in the book of life, who were not “listed with the righteous,”[[12]](#footnote-12) were thrown into the lake of fire.

1. Luke 8:30-31 “Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Romans 10:6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See my book *Hedges*, Index #8 for a complete list of Scriptures and synonyms relating to demons and the devil. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Justin Martyr in Dialogues with Trypho, Chapter 80 - The Opinion of Justin with Regard to the Reign of a Thousand Years [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Justin Martyr in Dialogues with Trypho, Chapter 81. Justin lived 100-ca 165 AD. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Papias, who had personal contact with those taught by Christ and His apostles and may well have been a disciple of the apostle John, asserted that "the Lord used to teach concerning those [end] times" that "there will be a period of a thousand years after the resurrection of the dead and the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this very earth" (cited in Eusebius HE iii.39.12 ; Irenaeus Adv. haer. v.33.3 f). (from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, revised edition, Copyright © 1979 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. All rights reserved.) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Augustine of Hippo, November 13, 354 – August 28, 430. His life and teachings coincided with and supported the ascendency of the governing church. His interpretation of the Millennium as the church of his day ruling with Christ on the earth provided theological support to that idea and it proved to be very important in history for the next 1300 years, mostly for the good. Even though he used this scripture to encourage his generation toward governance, his good ideas were not entirely faithful to the actual words of the text. The futurist approach follows Justin, Papias, and Irenaeus rather than Augustine and allows the text to speak for itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. City of God, Book 20, Chapter 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 1Thes 4:16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. John’s first is *protos* (pro'-tos); meaning foremost (in time, place, order or importance). In the KJV it is translated before, beginning, best, chief (-est), first (of all), former. If we use the term “best” resurrection, as compared to the resurrection that ends in death, then the meaning is clear and there is no conflict with Paul or in our eschatological understanding. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In the KJV it is the lake of fire and brimstone. The word “fire” is *pur*. Brimstone is *theion* or sulphur. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Psalm 69:28 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)