Revelation 20

The Thousand Years and the Great White Throne

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Satan is bound, the faithful reign with Christ, and the last rebellion ends with fire from heaven. Then every person stands before the great white throne, and only one thing matters: is my name written in the book of life?

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

00 The Text

REVELATION 20 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions
Green Command / instruction
⇄ Sky Key repeated word
⚠ Rose Sin / warning
★ Violet Promise / blessing
◷ Amber Time / place / contrast

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

2 And he laid hold on ⚠ the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him ⇄ 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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Marked in the text

- **v1** ⇄ bottomless pit *(every occurrence)*
- **v2** ⚠ the dragon, that old serpent
- **v2** ⇄ a thousand years *(every occurrence)*
- **v3** ⚠ deceive the nations
- **v3** ◷ a little season
- **v4** ★ judgment was given unto them
- **v4** ★ for the witness of Jesus
- **v4** ★ lived and reigned with Christ
- **v5** ⇄ the first resurrection *(every occurrence)*
- **v6** ★ Blessed and holy
- **v6** ⇄ the second death *(every occurrence)*
- **v6** ★ priests of God
- **v7** ◷ Satan shall be loosed
- **v8** ◷ Gog and Magog
- **v9** ▲ fire came down from God
- **v10** ⚠ lake of fire *(every occurrence)*
- **v11** ▲ a great white throne
- **v11** ◷ fled away
- **v12** ◷ small and great
- **v12** ★ the book of life *(every occurrence)*
- **v12** ⇄ according to their works *(every occurrence)*
- **v13** ⚠ death and hell *(every occurrence)*
- **v15** ⚠ not found written

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Where the KJV says "bottomless pit" and "hell," the NASB says "abyss" and "Hades."

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 20:11–12 (KJV)

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.

Setting

The King has come (19:11–16), the beast and false prophet are in the lake of fire (19:20). Now John sees what happens to the dragon himself, to the saints, and finally to the dead. Again and again he writes "I saw" (vv1, 4, 11, 12).

Structure

- vv1–3 — **Satan bound:** an angel comes down "holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand" (v1). He lays hold of "the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan," binds him for a thousand years (v2), throws him into the abyss, shuts and seals it "so that he would not deceive the nations any longer" (v3). Afterward "he must be released for a short time."
- vv4–6 — **the saints reign:** thrones, and judgment given to those who sit on them. The souls of those beheaded "because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God," who had not

worshiped the beast or taken his mark — "they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (v4). "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection" (v5). "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power" (v6).

- vv7–10 — **Satan released and finished:** after the thousand years he is released and deceives the nations "in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog" — a number "like the sand of the seashore" (vv7–8). They surround "the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them" (v9). The devil is thrown into the lake of fire "where the beast and the false prophet are also," tormented "day and night forever and ever" (v10).
- vv11–15 — **the great white throne:** earth and heaven flee from His presence (v11). The dead, great and small, stand before the throne; books are opened, and "another book … which is the book of life" (v12). Everyone is judged "according to their deeds" (vv12–13). Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire — "This is the second death, the lake of fire" (v14). "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (v15).

Repeated words

a thousand years (six times, vv2–7); abyss / bottomless pit (vv1, 3); deceive (vv3, 8, 10); reign (vv4, 6); first resurrection (vv5, 6); second death (vv6, 14); lake of fire (vv10, 14, 15); book(s) / book of life (vv12, 15); according to their deeds (vv12, 13); the dead (vv5, 12, 13).

Contrasts

Satan shut in the abyss (v3) ⟷ released for a short time (v7). Those who "came to life" (v4) ⟷ "the rest of the dead did not come to life" (v5). The first resurrection ⟷ the second death (v6). The saints on thrones (v4) ⟷ the dead standing before the throne (v12). The books of deeds ⟷ the book of life (v12). A thousand years of Christ's reign ⟷ a human heart that still rebels at the end (vv8–9).

Chapter theme (my words)

Satan is bound, the faithful reign with Christ, and the last rebellion ends with fire from heaven. Then every person stands before the great white throne, and only one thing matters: is my name written in the book of life?

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 20:4–6 (KJV)

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

How to read the thousand years

Christians have held three main views. I want to know all three before I settle:

- **Premillennial** — Christ returns (ch. 19) *before* a literal thousand-year reign on earth. This is Guzik's view, the view of the early church fathers until Augustine, and the view my Revealing Revelation workbook follows.
- **Amillennial** — the thousand years are symbolic of the present church age; Satan is "bound" by the gospel's advance (Matt 12:29), and the saints reign now in heaven. Guzik traces it to Tyconius and Augustine; much of the Reformation held it.
- **Postmillennial** — the gospel gradually wins the world, ushering in a golden age, and Christ returns after it.

Guzik's case for premillennialism: chapter 20 follows chapter 19 in sequence ("Then I saw"); Satan clearly still "deceives the nations" today (2 Cor 4:4; 1 Pet 5:8); and over 400 Old Testament verses describe a coming earthly reign (Ps 72; Isa 2:2–4; 11:4–9; Jer 23:5–6). To spiritualize the binding, he says, "does not take the text seriously." Seiss: "Is this a literal transaction? Certainly it is."

Satan bound (vv1–3)

Notice who does it — "only an unnamed angel" (Morris, in Guzik). Satan is no rival god; one angel with a chain is enough. Barnhouse: "the conquest of Satan and his powers does not come by any human effort." His four names tell his record: dragon (cruel), serpent of old (the deceiver of Eden, Gen 3:1), devil (slanderer), Satan (adversary). The purpose of the prison is specific: so he would not *deceive* the nations. Seiss: deception is "the great work and business of Satan in every age."

Thrones and the first resurrection (vv4–6)

Who sits on the thrones? Guzik lists the options: the twenty-four elders, the apostles (Matt 19:28), or the saints together (1 Cor 6:2–3; Rev 3:21). Then John singles out the martyrs of the tribulation — the word for "beheaded" really means executed — and shows them vindicated and reigning. The first resurrection is the resurrection of the righteous (John 5:28–29; Luke 14:14). Walvoord: it "is not an event but an order of resurrection" — Christ the firstfruits, then those who are His at His coming (1 Cor 15:20–23), completed with these martyrs. Over them "the second death has no power." They will be "priests of God and of Christ" — the calling Israel was given at Sinai (Exod 19:6) and the church has now (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6).

Why release Satan? (vv7–10)

This is the hardest question in the chapter. Guzik's answer: the millennium proves that man's problem is not his environment but his heart. After a thousand years under a perfect King, with Satan locked away, the nations still rebel the moment they're tempted. Hoste, in Guzik: the human heart "remains at heart only evil and at enmity with God" apart from new birth (Jer 17:9; John 3:3). "Gog and Magog" borrows the names from Ezekiel 38–39, but Guzik sees a different battle — Ezekiel's comes before Christ's return, this one after the millennium. Again there is no battle: fire from heaven devours them (v9). The devil joins the beast and false prophet, who are *still there* after a thousand years — the lake of fire does not annihilate. "Forever and ever" is literally "to the ages of the ages" (Walvoord).

The great white throne (vv11–15)

Great in authority, *white* in purity, a *throne* because the King sits as Judge (John 5:22). Earth and heaven flee — there is nowhere left to hide (contrast Adam hiding in the garden, Gen 3:8). Walvoord: the dead are standing because "they are now about to be sentenced." Guzik notes that believers do not stand here; our sins were judged at the cross (John 5:24; Rom 8:1). We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ for reward, not condemnation (2 Cor 5:10; 1 Cor 3:12–15).

Two kinds of books are opened. The *books* record deeds — Mounce: "the irrefutable evidence of a man's actual relationship with God." Judgment by deeds also means degrees of punishment (Matt 11:20–24). But the deciding book is the *book of life* (Exod 32:32–33; Dan 12:1; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8). No one is saved by what is written in the first books; everyone is lost who is not written in the second. Death and Hades — the grave and the holding place of the dead — are themselves thrown into the lake of fire (1 Cor 15:26). Alford: "there is also a second and deeper death."

Word study (Greek)

- **abyss — *abyssos* (G12):** the bottomless pit, a prison for demons (Luke 8:31; Rev 9:1).
- **bound — *deō* (G1210):** to tie, bind, imprison.
- **deceive — *planaō* (G4105):** to lead astray, cause to wander — Satan's chief work (12:9; 20:3, 8, 10).
- **thousand — *chilioi* (G5507):** a thousand; Latin *mille* gives us "millennium."
- **beheaded — *pelekizō* (G3990):** from *pelekys*, an axe — executed.
- **testimony — *martyria* (G3141):** witness; *martys* (G3144) became our word "martyr."

- **came to life — *zaō* (G2198):** to live; the same verb for the saints (v4) and the rest of the dead (v5).
- **resurrection — *anastasis* (G386):** a standing up again.
- **blessed — *makarios* (G3107):** the fifth of Revelation's seven beatitudes.
- **released — *lyō* (G3089):** to loose, set free.
- **tormented — *basanizō* (G928):** to torture, torment.
- **forever and ever — *eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn* (G165):** "to the ages of the ages."
- **book — *biblion* (G975) / *biblos* (G976):** a scroll, a written record.
- **deeds — *ergon* (G2041):** works, what a person does.
- **Hades — *hadēs* (G86):** the realm of the dead; the Greek counterpart of Hebrew *Sheol*.

Cross-references

Gen 3:1, 15; Exod 19:6; Exod 32:32–33; Ps 2:6–9; Ps 72:8–11; Isa 2:2–4; Isa 11:1–10; Isa 65:20–25; Ezek 38–39; Dan 7:9–10, 22, 27; Dan 12:1–2; Zech 14:9–17; Matt 19:28; Matt 25:41; John 5:22–29; Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 6:2–3; 1 Cor 15:20–26; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Pet 3:8; Rev 3:5, 21; Rev 12:9; Rev 21:8.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 20:15 (KJV)

15 And whosoever was ⚠ not found written in ★ the book of life was cast into the ⚠ lake of fire.

Command to obey — be faithful to death

The martyrs refused the mark "because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God" (v4). The pressure I face is smaller, but it is real — to go along, stay quiet, take the easy mark. Today I'll speak for Jesus where I've been silent. For the men I disciple, faithfulness may look like a hard phone call, an honest step-four inventory, or walking away from old friends.

Sin to confess — "it's my environment."

I like to blame my circumstances: if things were different, I'd be different. The millennium ends that excuse. A perfect King, a perfect world, no devil — and the human heart still rebels (vv8–9). My problem is my heart, and only the new birth fixes it (Ezek 36:26; John 3:3). That's the message for every man in recovery: a new zip code isn't a new heart.

Warning to heed — the books are open

Every deed is written (v12). Nothing is hidden, nothing forgotten, no one too small or too great to stand there. If I'm counting on my good outweighing my bad, the books will not save me. The only question at that throne is v15.

Promise to trust — "over these the second death has no power."

If I belong to Christ, I will die once at most, and death has already lost its sting (1 Cor 15:55–57). I will not stand at the great white throne for condemnation (John 5:24; Rom 8:1). My name is written (Luke 10:20) — and Jesus said that is the thing to rejoice in.

Example to follow — the deceiver is on a chain

One unnamed angel binds him. Satan is strong, but he is not God's equal and never was. When I feel overpowered by temptation, I remember who holds the key (Rev 1:18) and that "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom 16:20).

Worship

Death and Hades — the two enemies every man fears — are themselves thrown away (v14). The last enemy is abolished. The next chapter promises "no longer any death" (21:4). I worship the Judge who is also my Savior.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Judge of all the earth, thank You that my name is written in the book of life by Your grace and not by my deeds. Give me courage to bear testimony to You when it costs me something. Don't let me blame my circumstances for what is in my heart. Make me urgent for the men around me whose names I want to see written there too. Amen.

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