

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 20 is possibly the most misused chapter in the entire Bible. Other chapters such as Dan. 7 and Mt. 24 are also greatly misused in order to support certain theories about chapter 20. As we study this chapter, we must strive to interpret it in light of other teachings in the Bible, not according to what we may hear on the radio or television. Contrary to what many believe, the meanings of the symbols used in this chapter can be derived with a great deal of certainty. Probably the reason this chapter is so misunderstood is because so many different ideas and theories are proposed that it becomes difficult to choose what is right and what is wrong. We must cast aside those theories proposed by men and study the chapter solely in light of the teachings of the New Testament.

Before studying the chapter verse by verse, we need to clearly establish the meaning of one symbol – the period of time described as a thousand years. Once this is established, many other symbols in this great chapter will become clear.

Many in the religious world today believe and teach that there will be a literal period of one thousand years after the second coming of Christ in which he will set up an earthly kingdom in the land of Israel and reign as king over his people on this earth in a physical, earthly kingdom. Seemingly, the disciples of Christ had this same mistaken belief when he was on earth during the first century.

wilderness from the time they crossed the Red Sea until they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. The church is a spiritual entity, and it is wandering in a spiritual wilderness of sin in this world today. This period of time began at the cross and will last until Christ comes again. Therefore, the “1000 years” is a symbolic period of time that represents the entire gospel age.

The number “1000” is used symbolically to represent ultimate completeness. It is derived by multiplying the complete number “10” by itself three times ($10 \times 10 \times 10$). Therefore, the number “1000” is used to describe a period of time that is complete in the sight of God. It is not a literal thousand years. The “thousand years” is this present gospel age. It began with the first coming of Christ and will last until he comes again. Verse 7 also indicates that there will be members of the Lord’s church alive on this earth when he returns, but they will be surrounded by a world of sin.

Many times in Revelation, we find the same event being described by several different symbols. Each of these symbols, although describing the same event, gives us different information about that particular event. This is true in the case of the “thousand years.” This “thousand years” covers the same period of time as; (1) the first six seals, 6:1-8:5; (2) the first six trumpets, 8:6-11:19; (3) the first six plagues, 16:1-21; (4) forty-two months, 13:5; and (6) time, times, and half a time, 12:14. Although all of these symbols are describing events taking place during our present gospel age, each gives a different perspective of this time period. The symbolic “thousand years” simply shows that it is a complete period of time. After the thousand years are finished, there will be no further opportunities for mankind to become obedient to God’s will. God’s gospel plan will be completed. Those who have chosen to be obedient to that gospel will dwell with God in heaven forever, and those who have rejected the gospel will have their place in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (21:8).

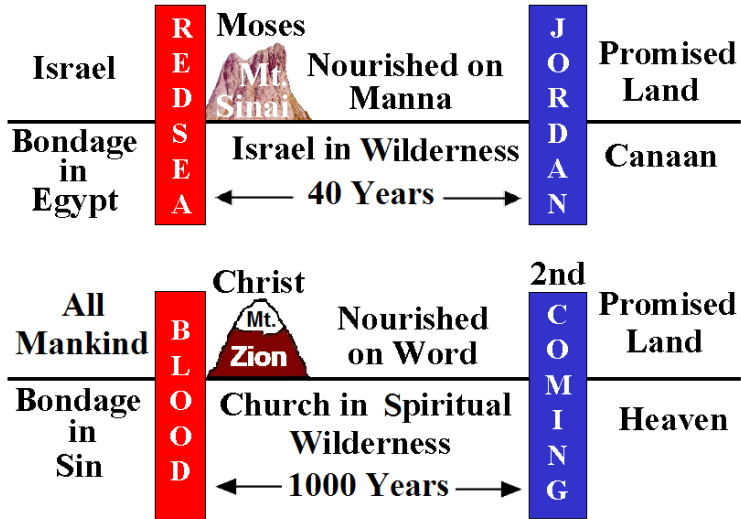
Another important fact that needs to be brought out about

chapter 20, is that the subject of verses 1-10 is the destruction of the devil. This is the natural order to follow because chapter 19 described the destruction of the beast and the false prophet. The devil is responsible for the evil that is in the world today, with the beast and false prophet being manifestations of that evil. When God destroys evil in this world upon the second coming of Christ, the devil himself will finally be destroyed. Therefore, chapters 19 and 20 teach that those who reject God in order to follow the devil will ultimately spend an eternity in hell with him.

One other point should be made about the “thousand years.” Verse 7 seems to indicate that there will come a time upon this earth when men will cease to listen to the call of the gospel and become obedient to it. This period of time is called the “little season.” This is figuratively described as a time when the devil will gather his followers together. At this time, Christ will return to take his children home and destroy those who oppose him. Therefore, the gospel age will last until Christ returns, but at the end of this age there will be a short time when sin will prevail upon this earth and people will refuse to become obedient to the gospel.

As we begin the study of chapter 20, we should once again let the Biblical parallel between Israel and the church determine the meaning of these symbols. The portion of the parallel diagram that is used in this chapter is the parallel

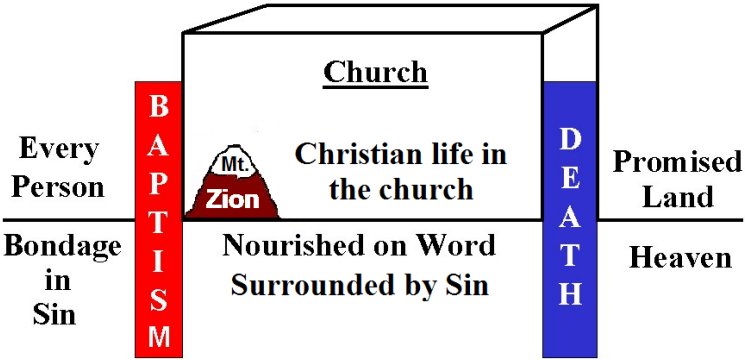
A Parallel Comparison of Israel and the Church



between the Red Sea and the blood of Christ. Just as Israel escaped physical bondage by crossing the Red Sea, mankind today escapes the bondage of sin by crossing the red sea of the blood of Christ. When we cross the blood of Christ by our obedience to the gospel, we come to Mt. Zion. As members of the church, we then wander in the wilderness of sin as we strive to live a Christian life. Our spiritual nourishment is the Word of God.

The key verse to build on while studying chapter 20 is verse 6. It says if we have a part in the first resurrection, the second death will have no power over us. Christ was the first person resurrected from the grave, never to die again. We have a part in that resurrection by our obedience to the gospel through baptism. Just as Christ was resurrected from the grave, never to die again, we are resurrected from the spiritual grave of sin never to die spiritually. If we remain faithful, the second death (hell) has no power over us. When the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, they were delivered from the bondage of slavery. When we cross the red sea of the blood of Christ through baptism, we are delivered from the bondage of sin. We then reign with Christ in the church during the symbolic 1000 years. This is illustrated in the drawing below. Every Christian will follow this pattern.

Christians Follow the Pattern



THE BINDING OF SATAN

Verses 1, 2. And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

Verses 1 and 2 picture an angel taking a great chain and binding the devil for one thousand years. With the interpretation of the thousand years as being this present gospel age, the obvious question would be: Is Satan bound today? The answer to that question is, Yes! He is not bound in the sense that he cannot function on earth today, but he is bound to the extent that he has no power over God's people. Concerning Christ, Heb. 2:14b says that "through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Christ through his death and resurrection destroyed (bound) Satan in the sense that Satan no longer rules in the world. Those people who lived under the law of Moses had no immediate forgiveness of their sins. They could only make yearly atonement for their sins while looking forward to Christ's sacrifice on the cross for complete forgiveness (Heb. 10:3-4). The sins of those under the old law were not forgiven until Christ died on the cross (Heb. 9:15). Therefore, Satan ruled in the world until Christ died on the cross and destroyed or bound him.

Those becoming Christians today have forgiveness of their sins immediately available through Christ. Satan can no longer control the Christian's life. As long as we remain faithful to our Lord by being obedient to his will, our sins are continually forgiven (1Jn. 1:7), and Satan has no control over us. He is bound!

The angel that bound Satan used a great chain. A chain would symbolize a powerful restraint. Rom.



1:16 says that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. We bind Satan in our own lives when we become obedient to the gospel and obtain the salvation offered to us. If the gospel is God's power unto salvation, then it follows that the symbolic chain refers to the gospel. Satan is bound by the gospel.

Satan being bound by the angel illustrates the fact that this binding came from God. We know that Satan was bound when man received the gift of forgiveness of his sins, and this took place when Christ died and rose again. Therefore, the angel is used in verse 2 to illustrate the works that Jesus has performed. There are several passages in Revelation where an angel is doing the works commanded by God or is serving as a messenger from God. (See 14:15,18.) Angels are used throughout Revelation to show John these visions. This verse is no different. This angel is showing John, as well as all Christians, that the gospel has been sent from God, and it will bind the devil during the Christian age (thousand years) for all those who are obedient to it.

Verse 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.

This angel cast the devil into the bottomless pit and sealed it, thereby making sure he would have no chance of escape. This bottomless pit is a figurative description of the dwelling place of Satan. He dwells only where there is sin. He has no right or opportunity to dwell in the righteous life of the saints unless they elect to let him enter. Eph. 1:3 says we (Christians) have all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. These heavenly places, the church, is the dwelling place of the saints. The devil cannot enter! He is bound from these heavenly places and can dwell only where sin prevails – the bottomless pit.

The devil is told that he will be unable to deceive the nations any more until the thousand years are finished and

then only for a little season. (For a discussion on the loosing of Satan for a little season, see v. 7.) The idea that Satan is unable to deceive the nations is synonymous with the binding of Satan in verse 2. Satan no longer deceives those who are willing to accept Christ and the salvation offered in him. This concept is also presented in 12:9, which should be studied in close connection with this verse. It states, "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which *deceiveth* the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." (Emphasis mine) This verse defines the time in which Satan was to deceive the whole world. It was before he was cast out of heaven into the earth. Rev. 12:10 says that salvation and the kingdom came at the same time the devil was cast out of heaven. This obviously took place when Christ died on the cross. The devil could no longer accuse the brethren before God. Therefore, he was able to deceive the nations or accuse the brethren before God only up until the time Christ died on the cross. After that time, he could no longer deceive the whole world. He only deceives those who choose to follow him, thereby rejecting God. This situation will exist throughout the gospel age. Verses 7 and 8 indicate there will come a period of time at the end of the gospel age, the "little season," when Satan will once again deceive the nations. This seems to say that at that time no one else will render obedience to the gospel. (For more on this subject, see verse 2 and the discussion of the binding of Satan.)

THE THOUSAND-YEAR REIGN

Verse 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.

This verse is a description of those people who are living and reigning with Christ during the thousand years (the gospel age). They are Christians. They are the ones who have not worshiped the beast (13:4, 8); neither his image (13:14-15); neither have received his mark upon their foreheads or in their hands (13:16-17). Some of these people had also lost their lives because they had refused to worship anyone or anything other than the true God. (For further information concerning the meaning of worshiping the beast and his image, refer to the discussion of chapter 13.)

Those who are reigning with Christ are seated upon thrones and have been given judgment. Jesus told his twelve apostles in Mt. 19:28 that they would sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, at the same time the Son of Man sits in the throne of his glory. Christ is now sitting on his throne at God's right hand (Heb. 1:3). Therefore, we must be in the period of time when the apostles are judging the twelve tribes of Israel. "The twelve tribes of Israel" is a figurative representation of the church. (For more information, see 3:9.) Then, how are the apostles judging the twelve tribes or the church today? Jn. 12:48 says that man shall be judged by the words spoken by Christ. This is obviously a reference to the Bible or the gospel. Christ did not actually speak all the commandments we have to follow today but gave them by inspiration through the apostles and the letters they wrote to the various churches. The apostles were responsible for giving many of the commandments we must follow today. In this manner, the twelve apostles are judging the twelve tribes of Israel. In the likeness of this today, Christians are responsible for teaching, preaching, and spreading the gospel, the commandments of God, throughout the world. Also, 3:21 says that when anyone overcomes (obeys the gospel) they are granted to sit with Christ in his throne. (See comments on 3:21.) Therefore, it is figuratively stated in this verse that Christians are sitting on their thrones today with Christ and are responsible for the spreading of the gospel or the judgments that God has given unto us. We

are presently living and reigning with Christ during this gospel age or the thousand years. (See 5:10.)

Those who do not worship the beast or his image are the ones who live and reign with Christ a thousand years. They are Christians. They have taken part in the first resurrection as described in verse 6. The key to understanding this verse is understanding that this resurrection is a spiritual resurrection. Eph 2:1 states, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins,” (NKJV) To be “made alive” is to be resurrected. Those who have not obeyed the gospel are “dead in trespasses and sins.” We undergo a spiritual resurrection when we are baptized into Christ. The rest of the dead (the spiritual dead) lived not again until the thousand years were finished. Those who have not obeyed the gospel are spiritually dead. They have not take part in the “first resurrection.” Christians are the ones who take part in the “first resurrection” as they are resurrected from the grave of sin to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). When one becomes obedient to the gospel, he is resurrected from his grave of sin and begins a new life with Christ. He reigns with him during the thousand years, or the gospel age.

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

Verse 4 taught that Christians are the ones who were resurrected to live with Christ during the thousand-year period. This verse says that the remainder of the people who are dead lived not again, or were not resurrected, until after the thousand years are finished. One group of people are resurrected to reign during the thousand years; they are Christians. There is another group who are not resurrected until after the thousand years are finished. They are non-Christians. With this in mind, it becomes extremely important to determine exactly what is meant by the first resurrection. There is a definition for this first resurrection in Col. 2:12-13. It states, “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the

operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.” (Emphasis mine.) Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead by God. We are dead in our sins outside of Christ. Through baptism we are buried with him. We are also “quickened” or “made alive.” We are resurrected with him. Col. 3:1 says, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.” A Christian is one who has become dead to sin and has been raised or resurrected to walk a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:3-11). According to Rom. 6:11, we are dead unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Therefore, the Christian's first resurrection is the resurrection of the soul from the grave of sin. It is a spiritual resurrection. Col. 1:18 says that Christ was the firstborn from the dead, and Rom. 6:3-5 says that we have a part in that resurrection by baptism, which is a likeness of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Because of this, we are to walk in “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4) or reign with Christ during the thousand years (v. 4). Those who are not obedient to our Lord through baptism will not live (spiritually) during this gospel age or thousand years. They are dead in their sins.

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.

This is the key verse in understanding this chapter. It determines how we should interpret the symbols throughout this vision. The first symbol that must be understood is the “first resurrection.” This is a direct reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was the first person to be resurrected from the dead – never to die again. Speaking of Christ Col 1:15 says, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Also, in Col 1:18 we read, “And He is the head of the body, the

church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” The “first resurrection” is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A blessing is pronounced on those who have a part in his first resurrection. The question that must be answered here is: How do we have a part in his resurrection? Some of the following comments have been made in the preceding verses, but we believe it is important to put everything in context in this verse. Rom 6:5 states, “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection.” We have a part, or participate, in Jesus’ resurrection when we do something that is in the “likeness” of his death and resurrection. This is defined in Rom 6:4, which says, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Through our baptism we emulate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We have a part in his first resurrection.

Those who have a part in the first resurrection will be priests of God. We know that Christians are the priests of God today. In Rev. 1:5-6 we read:

Rev 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and* the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

Rev 1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Through our baptism, Jesus washes us in his blood and we become priests of God.

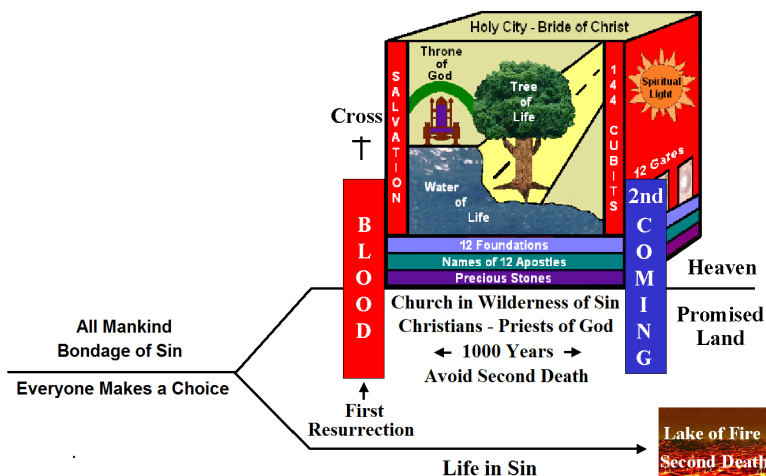
According to this verse, those who have a part in the first resurrection will reign with Christ during the “1000 years.” The meaning of the “1000 years” has previously been discussed in this chapter. Simply stated, it is the period of time between the cross and second coming of Christ. The

church will exist all during this period of time, and all those who become members of it will live spiritually and reign with Christ as priests of God. This will occur all during the symbolic “1000 years.”

We also know that this is the correct meaning of the “first resurrection” because this verse states that the second death will not have any power over those who have a part in the “first resurrection.” According to Rev. 20:14 and 21:8, the second death is hell. It is defined as the lake of fire or the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. We have a part in the “first resurrection” by our obedience to the gospel through baptism. This how we avoid the second death.

It should be noted here that this verse is in total agreement with Rev. 2:11. In that verse we are told that we avoid the second death by “overcoming.” We also “overcome” this world of sin through our baptism. This makes the two symbols of “overcoming” and “first resurrection” refer to the same event. (See Rev. 2:11 for a complete discussion.)

This verse can be illustrated by the drawing below. Please look closely at the drawing and read the explanation given.



In this drawing the church is pictured as existing between the blood of Christ and his second coming. That is the symbolic “1000 year” period of time. Every accountable person in this world will make a choice between being obedient to the gospel of Christ and living with him in the church or living a life of sin and spending eternity in the lake of fire. Those who choose to be obedient to God will be priests of God and avoid the second death. When Christ returns, Christians will cross over into our promised land of heaven.

Rev. 5:10 says Christ has made us kings and priests and we shall reign on the earth. Those who are obedient to the gospel are reigning on the earth today and are a holy priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ (1Pet. 2:5).

SATAN LOOSED

Verse 7. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,

This is undeniably a difficult verse to interpret, mainly because it deals with events at the close of the thousand year period, which will take place sometime in the future. Anytime there is a difficult symbol, it must be interpreted strictly in accordance with the meanings of the symbols that are understood. Notice that Satan will be loosed after the thousand years are expired. This means that Satan will continue to be bound by the gospel all during the symbolic “thousand years.” Since Satan is bound by the gospel, this must mean that there will come a “little season,” or short period of time, when the gospel will no longer bind Satan. This takes place at the end of the thousand years. The only logical meaning to this is that there will come a time shortly before Christ comes again in which people will refuse to hear the gospel. All people who will ever become obedient to the gospel will have done so. Therefore, this very likely means that there will be a time near the end of this physical earth and shortly before the second coming of Christ when sin will dominate the world. The gospel will

spread no further. This is a frightening interpretation, but when we look at the world around us, we see sin on every hand. Seemingly, fewer and fewer people are willing to listen to the teachings of God's Word. They choose rather to enjoy the pleasures of sin. This makes us believe that this may be an accurate description of the situation in which the world is heading.

There is also another Biblical foundation for this interpretation. Mt. 24:36-39 teaches that the end of this world will come when a situation similar to the time of Noah exists on this earth. Mt. 24:37 states, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." During that time, the only people who were faithful to God were Noah and his family. No else would listen to the preachings of Noah. Gen 6:5 states, "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually." God destroyed the world with water at a time when everyone, except Noah and his family, had their minds on doing evil. They would not listen to Noah as he warned them of the coming destruction. We believe it is very possible that this "little season" is a symbolic description of a time similar to the days of Noah that will exist shortly before Christ comes again. The thoughts and actions of the people of this earth will be on evil continually, and no one will listen to the teachings of the gospel. Everyone who will obey the gospel will have done so.

Verse 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.

The interpretation of verse 7 is further strengthened by this verse, which explains that during this "little season," Satan will deceive all nations in the four corners of the earth. All people on earth who are not already Christians will be deceived by Satan and will be under his control due to their sinful state. According to 2Thess. 2:10-12, God will

send a “strong delusion” to those who “believe not the truth” that they should believe a lie and be damned. With these things in mind, it becomes very likely that near the end of time, sin will rage throughout the world and people will totally reject God. These verses seem to teach that the end of time will come when all people who will ever become obedient to God’s law will have done so. Of course, we have no idea when that time will occur. It could be today or many, many years in the future.

“Gog and Magog” are terms that first-century Christians recognized as representing all people who oppose God and his followers (Eze. Chapters 38 and 39). They represent vast numbers of people who cannot be counted, just as the sands of the sea could not be counted. These people will be living in sin as followers of Satan. The gathering together to battle in this passage is figurative. It does not mean that Satan will literally gather his followers together into a certain area on the earth to prepare for a physical battle against God’s people. It means that Satan will rule in these people’s lives, and they will make war against God’s people by attempting to cause Christians to engage in the sins in which they are practicing. This could also be a time of great persecution.

Verse 9. And they went upon 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.

Once again it is stated that sin will completely surround the camp of the saints, which is the church. All those who are not in the church, also referred to as the beloved city, will be intent on remaining in their sinful ways. The borders of the kingdom, the church, will spread no further. When the world reaches this point, fire will come down from God and destroy Satan and his followers. This is representative of the second coming of Christ. At this time, God will destroy all who oppose him and gather his faithful to live with him eternally in heaven. This interpretation coincides perfectly with 2Thess. 1:7-9 which says, “And to

you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”

Verse 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.

Upon Christ’s second coming, the devil will be cast into hell where he will dwell for all eternity with those whom he has deceived. They will be in complete torment forever and ever. This eternal destruction will take them forever out of the presence of God and his people. In heaven all things will be holy. There will be no evil, no temptation, and no sin to bring suffering on God’s people.

It should be noted again that the subject of verses 1-10 in chapter 20 is the destruction of Satan. Verse 10 is a description of that destruction. A description of the destruction of the beast and the false prophet was given in 19:20. The meanings of the beast and false prophet are given in chapter 13. Basically, they are followers of Satan. The beast represents the forces that oppose God and persecute those who follow him. The false prophet represents those who practice false religion, or those who claim to follow God but are unwilling to submit to his commands. (See Rom. 10:1-3.) All of these people will spend eternity in hell with Satan who deceived them.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

Verse 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.

The preceding verses gave a description of events that are to take place here on earth during the gospel age (the thousand years) and up to the second coming of Christ.

Verse 11 takes us into the time of Judgment. God is sitting on the great white throne, and all physical things as we know them, the earth and heavens, will no longer exist. When the Lord shall come, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2Pet. 3:10).

The throne of God is described as being great and white. As always, white indicates purity and holiness. The throne is great because it is the seat of God Almighty. Christians of the first century were suffering tremendous persecutions originating from the throne of the Roman emperors, but God’s Throne is the greatest throne of all. There is no power greater than God’s. When we obey God’s laws, we come into the presence of the greatest throne of all, and if we continue faithful, we will live with him eternally. (For more discussion about the throne of God, see comments on chapter 4.)

Verse 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.

The event that will immediately follow Christ’s second coming is Judgment. At this time everyone who has ever lived will stand before the Throne of God to be judged. Both small and great will be there. No one will be able to escape, regardless of how insignificant they may have been in man’s eyes, or how powerful or great they may have been.

The books will be opened, and we shall be judged according to the things that are written in those books. There can be little doubt concerning the identity of these books. They must represent the laws that God gave man to follow. This would be the law of Moses, as recorded in the Old Testament, and the law of Christ, as recorded in the New Testament. Jn. 12:48 quotes Christ saying, “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last

day.” We who live in this present Christian dispensation will be judged according to the new law, which was established by Christ when he died. (See Heb. 9:15-17.) Those who lived under the Law of Moses will be judged according to that law.

The book of life represents God’s record of those who have been faithful to him. (See Phil. 4:3.) There are also references to the book of life in 3:5 and 22:19.

All who stand before the judgment seat of God will be judged according to their works or deeds done on earth. The books that will judge us are available to us today in the form of the Bible. We are to read and study that book and do the things contained therein in order to be obedient to God. This is what it means to be judged according to our works. We read in 2Cor. 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

Verse 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.

This verse emphasizes the fact that all must stand before God to be judged. Everyone who has undergone death at this time will be resurrected to stand before God’s Throne. Verse 13 restates the fact that man will be judged according to his works. We must do the works God expects of us in order to be acceptable to him. Anyone who believes otherwise needs to read these two verses very carefully. (For further comments about being judged according to our works, see v. 12.)

Verse 14. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

This is a description of the final destruction of all things opposed to God. Death and hell, or the grave, will be destroyed. The last enemy to be destroyed will be death (1Cor. 15:26). Man brought death into the world by his sins

(Rom. 5:12), and Christ through his righteousness will destroy that death. God's people will dwell eternally in a place where there will be no death and no grave.

This final destruction is referred to as the second death. This is the final destruction of the soul. It is a spiritual death to which those who oppose God will be doomed to suffer for all eternity.

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

Those who have not been obedient to God's laws will be cast into the lake of fire, which represents eternal destruction and torment in a place totally away from the presence of God. Without God's presence, nothing good can exist. The only things that can exist in a place such as this will be torment and sorrow.

The ones who avoid this place of eternal torment will be those whose names are written in the book of life. The book of life is in direct contrast to the second death. Those who oppose God will undergo the second death, but those who are obedient to God will not die again (2:11). They will have the right to eternal life. Those who have had a part in the first resurrection (v. 5) will not be affected by this second death. They are the same ones who have their names written in the book of life. They have been resurrected spiritually, never to die again. Those who have not had a part in the first resurrection are spiritually dead and will also suffer the second death or hell.

Verse 15 tells of the final dwelling place of those who are disobedient to God, but in this chapter we are told nothing concerning the final dwelling place of Christians. It is our belief that 21:1 is the concluding verse of this vision. In that verse, we see a new heaven and a new earth that, according to 2Pet. 3:10-13, is the final dwelling place of Christians. If we include 21:1 with this vision, it becomes complete. All will stand before the great white throne to be judged (v. 11). Sinners will be cast into the lake of fire (v. 15), but Christians will dwell in a new heaven and a new earth (21:1). (For a complete interpretation of 21:1, see

comments on that verse.)