The Millennium, Satan's Defeat, and the Great White Throne

Revelation 20 | **Wednesday, October 28**

> *"He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years… so that he would no longer deceive the nations." (20:2–3)*
>
> *"Then I saw a great white throne and one seated on it… and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books." (20:11–12)*

THE BIG IDEA

This is the most debated chapter in Revelation—but its core claims are clearer than its disputed chronology: **Satan's power is limited by God, the faithful share Christ's victory, evil is finally destroyed, and every person is accountable before the throne.** We'll teach the sure things with confidence and the timing questions with humility.

I THE BINDING OF SATAN (20:1–3)

An angel with the key to the abyss seizes "the _____, who is the devil and Satan" (cf. 12:9; Gen 3), binds him, and seals the abyss. Satan does not control his own confinement or release—heaven does.

What does the binding mean?

The stated purpose (v. 3): so he would "no longer _____"—a specific restriction, not the end of all evil.

- Premillennial: a future binding after Christ's return, during His earthly reign.
- Amillennial: begun at Christ's first coming—His death and resurrection restrain Satan as the gospel reaches the nations (Luke 10:18; Matt 12:28–29; John 12:31–32).

What do the thousand years represent?

Greek _____ ("a thousand years") → "millennium." This is the only passage that explicitly describes a thousand-year reign. Literal = an actual 1,000 years; symbolic = a complete, God-set period (fits Revelation's symbolic numbers—7, 12, 144,000, 1,260).

Balanced: the binding is a real limit on Satan's deception; the passage establishes divine control more than a detailed timetable. Literal or symbolic, the period's beginning, length, and end belong to God.

II THE FIRST RESURRECTION & REIGN OF THE SAINTS (20:4–6)

"The rest of the dead did not come to life… This is the _____." The verb _____ ("they lived / came to life") is used of both groups—so interpreters must say whether it means the same kind of life both times.

INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS — THE FIRST RESURRECTION

1) Bodily resurrection (Premillennial). Believers raised bodily at Christ's return; the rest raised after the millennium for judgment. ***Strength:*** *keeps ezēsan consistent in both verses.* ***Limitation:*** *hard to square two separated bodily resurrections with John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15 (one final judgment).*

2) Heavenly life after death (Amillennial). Deceased believers enter heavenly life and reign with Christ before the final bodily resurrection; John sees their "souls" (cf. 6:9–11). ***Strength:*** *fits the "souls" and throne imagery.* ***Limitation:*** *"resurrection" normally means death-to-body; the parallel ezēsan needs care.*

3) Spiritual resurrection / regeneration. The believer's passage from death to life in Christ (John 5:24–25; Eph 2:4–6). ***Strength:*** *fits the NT's wider resurrection language.* ***Limitation:*** *but these are people who died for their testimony, then seen reigning.*

➔ Balanced: the first resurrection signifies the vindication and reign of those who belong to Christ (esp. martyrs). The "souls" and throne imagery support a present heavenly reign, while the parallel ezēsan gives the bodily view real force—and the question can't be settled apart from how ch. 19 and 20 relate.

Over them the "_____" (the lake of fire, v. 14) has no power. They are "priests of God and of Christ" who reign (fulfilling 1:6; 5:10)—physical death they may face; final judgment has no claim on them.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES Rev 12:9, 11; 13:7; 6:9–11; 1:6; 5:10 • Gen 3 • Dan 7:9–27 • John 5:24–25, 28–29 • Acts 24:15 • Eph 2:4–6

III THE MAJOR MILLENNIAL INTERPRETATIONS

THE FOUR POSITIONS ON THE MILLENNIUM

Historic Premillennial. Christ returns before the millennium, raises the faithful, and reigns before Satan's last revolt and the general judgment; reads ch. 19–20 as consecutive; first resurrection is bodily. ***Strength:*** *a straightforward, consecutive reading of the visions.* ***Limitation:*** *relating a millennial kingdom (mortals, possible rebellion) to the final new creation is awkward.*

Dispensational Premillennial. Also pre-millennium return, but with a sharper Israel/church distinction and the millennium as the fulfillment of national promises to Israel; often a separate rapture. ***Strength:*** *preserves a future fulfillment of OT promises to Israel.* ***Limitation:*** *the rapture/tribulation/restoration sequence is synthesized from many passages, not stated in ch. 20.*

Amillennial. The millennium is Christ's present reign from His first to second coming; Satan bound now; believers reign in heaven; Satan's release = intensified opposition before the end. ***Strength:*** *fits Revelation's recapitulation and Christ's present reign (1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20–23).* ***Limitation:*** *must explain how Satan is "bound" while still active elsewhere in the NT.*

Postmillennial. The millennium is a long era of gospel success transforming the world before Christ returns; the thousand years likely symbolic; final revolt follows. ***Strength:*** *takes seriously the gospel's historical power and the nations acknowledging God.* ***Limitation:*** *Revelation stresses ongoing suffering; ch. 20 doesn't describe worldwide Christian dominance.*

➔ Balanced: all four explain the same elements—binding, the thousand years, the first resurrection, the saints' reign, Satan's release, final judgment. The hinges are whether ch. 20 follows ch. 19 chronologically, whether the years are literal or symbolic, and whether the first resurrection is bodily or heavenly. Teach the explicit affirmations with confidence and the reconstructions with humility.

IV SATAN'S FINAL REBELLION AND DEFEAT (20:7–10)

Released, Satan gathers the nations—"_____" (from Ezekiel 38–39)—from the four corners of the earth, an army like the sand of the sea. "Gog and Magog" = the nations assembled in rebellion; the scope is universal.

- They surround "the camp of the saints, the beloved city"—wilderness-camp + Jerusalem imagery. Some read literal Jerusalem; others the people of God. Either way, the target is those who belong to God.
- No real battle: ***fire from heaven*** consumes them (Ezek 38:22; 39:6). Satan is thrown into the lake of fire with the beast and false prophet—"day and night forever and ever." His defeat is irreversible.

Does the release mean the millennium failed? No—v. 3 already said he "must be released for a short time." It belongs to God's set sequence. John doesn't explain why God permits it; claiming to know the precise reason goes past the text.

V THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT (20:11–15)

A "great _____"; earth and heaven flee (the old order passing, before 21:1). The whiteness = the purity of divine judgment. The Judge is God, exercising judgment through Christ (John 5:22–27; Acts 17:31).

The books are opened

The dead, "great and small," stand before the throne. Books are opened—and "the _____" (Dan 7:10; Exod 32:32–33; Dan 12:1; cf. Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8). The books = the record of conduct (judgment is informed, not arbitrary); the book of life = those who belong to God.

Judged "according to their _____" — held inside the NT's grace-and-judgment frame (Eph 2:8–9; Rom 2:6–11; 2 Cor 5:10; Jas 2:14–26). Works don't purchase salvation; they reveal character and allegiance. The judgment publicly establishes the truth of each life.

Death and Hades destroyed — the second death

The sea, Death, and Hades give up their dead; then Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire—the abolition of death's dominion (1 Cor 15:26; cf. 21:4). The lake of fire is "the _____"; anyone not in the book of life is thrown into it.

> **INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS — THE LAKE OF FIRE**
>
> **1) Eternal conscious punishment.** The traditional view; stresses 20:10 and Matt 25:46.
>
> **2) Conditionalism / final destruction.** The "second death" is ultimate destruction, not unending conscious suffering; stresses the language of death and perishing.
>
> **3) Universal restoration (minority).** Judgment is ultimately restorative. ***Limitation:*** *the finality of ch. 20's judgment language is a substantial challenge to it.*
>
> **➔ Balanced: ch. 20 clearly teaches final judgment, every person's accountability, the deliverance of those in the book of life, and the end of death and satanic opposition. The exact nature of the lake of fire is debated; its function is not—the final, irreversible judgment of all that opposes God.**

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES Dan 7:10; 12:1 • Exod 32:32–33 • Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8 • John 5:22–27 • Rom 2:6–11 • 1 Cor 15:26 • Rev 21:1, 4

VI WHAT THIS PASSAGE TEACHES US

- Satan's authority is real but never independent — his binding, release, and destruction all happen inside limits God sets. This is no contest between equal powers.
- The faithful share Christ's victory even through death — the martyrs "defeated" in ch. 13 are seen reigning in ch. 20; the second death has no power over them.
- Final judgment is universal and moral — great and small, from every realm of the dead; the books show judgment is comprehensive and informed, the book of life shows what it is to belong to God.
- The defeat of evil includes the abolition of death — Death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, clearing the way for "death will be no more" (21:4).
- Live with awareness of final accountability — conduct matters even where wrongdoing looks profitable or hidden; nothing escapes divine knowledge.

TAKE-HOME TRUTH

> *Christians have disagreed for centuries about the millennium and the first resurrection—and faithful people still do. But the chapter's great claims don't wait on the timeline: God sets the limits of Satan's activity, Christ's faithful people share His victory even through death, every human life is weighed in righteous judgment, and the present order of death and rebellion will end. Revelation 20 leaves us ready for chapter 21: "The former things have passed away… Behold, I make all things new."*