

Understanding Revelation – Topic 32

The conclusion of human history

**When time is replaced
by eternity**

An exposition of Revelation Chapter 20

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Introduction

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold on the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up and set a seal on him so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. Revelation 20:1-3

Many have wondered whether the one thousand year time period – or millennium - of Revelation Chapter 20 is literal or symbolic. The fact that it transpires after the Second Advent indicates that this must be a literal period of time.¹

Jewish millennial tradition

The Jewish Rabbis thought, as the world was created in six days and on the seventh God rested, so there would be six millenary periods, followed by a sabbatical millennium. Out of seven years every seventh is the year of remission, so out of the seven thousand years of the world, the seventh millenary shall be the millenary of remission. A tradition in the house of Elias 200 AD states that the world is to endure six thousand years- two thousand years before the law, two thousand years under the law and two thousand years under the Messiah.²

We would agree with this theory in principle because simple Bible chronology confirms that Adam's creation was approximately 4000 BC.³ However, no attempt should be made to use the above to try and date the Second Advent, because the periods are only approximate. If *the little while* after the millennium (Revelation 20:3) is included in the seven thousand years (as it should) then it is impossible to estimate when the six thousand years will end.

Significance of the *bottomless pit*

The key to Revelation Chapter 20 is the term *bottomless pit* or abyss. In the Old Testament Greek translation this term is used at least nineteen times. It is often translated “the deep” meaning the ocean or the depths of the earth. Generally it means a place where there is no life. The first time the expression is used is at creation.

... and darkness was upon the face of the deep. Genesis 1:2

In the Greek Septuagint translation, the word *deep* is the same word translated *bottomless pit* in the New King James (NKJ) version of the book of Revelation. We believe the bottomless pit (or *abyss* or *the deep*) refers to the earth as a desolate, chaotic, wasteland like it was prior to creation. Scripture clearly affirms the claim that this earth in the future is to return to an empty, lifeless condition for a certain period of time.

¹ A.P. Cooke, *The Angel of Time*. (Sydney: Self-published, 1985).

² Robert Jamieson, Faussett and David Brown, *Bible Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1871), see Revelation 20.

³ Edward Rosendahl, *The Challenge of Biblical Chronology*, Ed. George Burnside (Sydney: Self-published, 1985).

Scriptural evidence

The first authority to confirm the state of the earth after the Second Coming is the prophet Jeremiah, who was given a vision of the future condition of the earth:

I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void (similar language to Genesis 1:2) and the heavens, they had no light. I beheld the mountains and indeed, they trembled and all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of the LORD, by his fierce anger. Jeremiah 4:23-26 (see also V27-28).

While this chapter referred initially to the Babylonian invasion of the land of Judah, it is obvious that this section of Jeremiah Chapter 4 did not apply to Judah. The prophet, after beholding the local scene of destruction, is then shown how the whole earth will become desolate. Obviously, Jeremiah 4:23-28 applies to the future, for the cities of the earth have not been broken down by the presence of the Lord. The Lord is present on earth now by his Spirit but he has never broken down all the cities. This must refer to the Second Coming of Christ when the literal cities of earth are broken down by his fierce anger.

In Revelation Chapters 15 and 16 the fierce anger of God is brought to view in the seven last plagues. These fall in the year prior to the Second Advent (see Revelation 18:8). In the seventh plague, the cities of the nations fall during the mighty earthquake that occurs at that time. Thus at the Second Advent, this world will be transformed into a wilderness – it will become a *bottomless pit*.

The second authority is the gospel prophet, Isaiah, who also predicted the future of this earth:

Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants. ...The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, for the Lord hath spoken this word. ...The earth is violently broken, the earth is split open, the earth is shaken exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall totter like a hut; its transgression shall be heavy upon it, and it will fall, and not rise again. It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will punish on high the host of exalted ones, and on the earth the kings of the earth. They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished. Isaiah 24:1, 3, 19-22.

Who are the *host of exalted ones* who are *on high*? The apostle Paul, in speaking of the Satan and his angels, likens them to *hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*. (Ephesians 6:12).

Revelation Chapter 20 tells us that during the millennium Satan and his hosts are imprisoned in the bottomless pit. This is a period of punishment for them. Isaiah also declares that *after many days they will be punished* (v22). Revelation Chapter 20 indicates that the *many days* will be one thousand years. Scripture is very clear that at the Second Advent of Christ this earth is to be emptied of life. (See also Zephaniah 1:14-18 where the same scene is portrayed).

Revelation Chapter 20 also declares that in the bottomless pit Satan will be bound with a great chain. We believe that this is a figurative chain - a chain of circumstances. These circumstances are the apocalyptic events that will transpire when Christ returns to this world.

The Second Advent

1. Resurrection of the saints

The first event will be the mighty resurrection of all God's sleeping saints, those who have died, faithfully believing in Christ. As the apostle Paul so beautifully declared:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. I Thessalonians 4:16.

This is the great resurrection of the just – the true believers in Christ. They will come back to life in the mighty resurrection at the Second Advent.

2. Saints taken to heaven

The second event is the translation of the living believers.

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. I Thessalonians 4:17

God's people are resurrected and translated and rise to meet Christ in the air. They then ascend with Him to their ultimate destination - the *many mansions* in heaven.

In My Father's house are many mansions...I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. John 14:2-3.

The *Father's house* is in the third heaven.⁴ That is where God's kingdom – heaven - is located. At His ascension Christ left this earth and went back to His Father's house. When He returns, He will take his people to heaven. This means that all of God's people are to be removed from this old earth.

3. Destruction of the unsaved

The third event of the Second Advent is the fate of the unprepared, the unsaved, those who have deliberately rejected the love of Christ.

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. I Thessalonians 5:1-3

The tragic destiny of the unsaved is revealed here. It is life or death at the Second Advent. We are either saved or destroyed.

⁴ A.P. Cooke, *New heaven, New Earth, New Jerusalem – All things new!* (Sydney: Self-published, 1985).

... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

Many people do not want to believe what the above verse declares, but we need to face the facts given to us in Scripture. We will either receive eternal life with Jesus Christ or we will perish (John 3:16). At the Second Advent there will only be two groups - the righteous and the wicked. If the righteous are translated and the wicked are destroyed at the Second Advent, then this means that the earth will become empty as Old Testament prophets declared. This is confirmed by Jeremiah in his terrible picture of Armageddon.

Therefore prophesy against them all these words, and say to them: The LORD will roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation; He will roar mightily against His fold. He will give a shout, as those who tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise will come to the ends of the earth - for the LORD has a controversy with the nations; He will plead His case with all flesh. He will give those who are wicked to the sword,' says the LORD." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Behold, disaster shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the farthest parts of the earth. and at that day the slain of the LORD shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground. Jeremiah 25:30-33.

The dead will not be lamented or buried because there are no human beings there to lament or bury them. God's people have been translated to the kingdom of heaven. The earth has been left empty. It is a *bottomless pit*, an abyss, and amid the ruins Satan will be imprisoned for a thousand years. The only scene before him will be the devastating evidence of his rebellion. How vain and senseless it will then appear.

The millennium

A false interpretation

Through the years, the majority of Christians have held that the saints will reign with Christ upon the earth during the millennium. Their basis for this is the Old Testament scriptures where many times the prophets point forward to the reign of peace, prosperity and righteousness when God is supreme on the earth. However, all these predictions now relate to the time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth.⁵ These promises were originally made to Israel who if faithful would have seen them fulfilled in a literal, local manner. Because they were not faithful, the predictions will be fulfilled in a worldwide manner when this earth is made new - after the millennium, not during the millennium (see Revelation 21:1-2).

⁵ See also Isaiah 65:17-25; 66:22-23; 11:5-9; 25:6-8; 55:12-13

Activities of the saints

Regarding God's people who have been taken to the kingdom of heaven, the Revelator declares:

After these things (events of the Second Advent) I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honour and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments... Revelation 19:1,2a.

Judgment

After the Second Advent, the saints are seen in heaven, and we read concerning them:

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them and judgment was committed to them. ...And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. V4

The saints are reigning, not on the earth but in heaven with Christ. During the millennium, judgment is given to them. However in the gospels Jesus declared:

Judge not that you be not judged. Matthew 7:1

Paul explains what this judgment will involve:

Do you not know that the saints will judge the (unsaved) world? ...Do you not know that we shall judge (fallen) angels? I Corinthians 6:2-3

With Christ the saints will examine the records of the unsaved, especially those of personal interest to them. When we get to the kingdom there are going to be tremendous surprises. Jesus warned,

...there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last. Luke 13:30

Many whom we expect to be there will be missing. Others whom we expected not to be there will be present. There may be questions raised in heaven when we realize who is missing. We will still have enquiring minds, reason and intelligence, and in fact these attributes to an even greater degree. Our questions will need to be answered and the answers will be found in the heavenly record books which hold the secret records for every individual. We will be able to investigate the records of any who are not there and ascertain the reasons. Then we will understand and be able to fully accept the decisions made.

Determination of punishment

Another aspect of the saints' work of judgment is that they, with Christ, will share in determining the degree of punishment that should justly be allotted to the unsaved. When we bear in mind that most of the saints will have loved ones who will be lost, this takes on real significance. On examining the record of their lost loved ones the saints will fully understand their earthly lives, their motives and thoughts and why they are not among the saved. There will be complete acquiescence concerning the sentence and total accord when in the final execution of the judgment they witness the fate of those who once were their own flesh and blood. There will be no dissenting thought or voice on the part of the saints.

Isaiah 65:17 declares, *For behold I create new heavens and a new earth...And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.* We should not interpret this as meaning that nothing in our earthly life will be remembered in heaven. If that were so, we

would not appreciate what Christ has done for us in this life. The Hebrew phrase *not come into mind* reads as *not come upon the heart* (KJV margin). This could mean that anything that will cause sorrow will not be remembered.

The Revelator singles out one particular group in the scene of the investigative judgment of the unsaved:⁶

...those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands... V4

This group comprises those who are the last to suffer for Christ. Their loyalty to Him leads them to clash with earthly powers that are led by the beast and his image. They are those who will be martyred for their faith before the close of probation.

There will be many martyrs. The fact that they are pictured as having been persecuted and beheaded highlights the significance of the judgment in which the saints are involved in heaven. In justice they, with Christ, determine the degree of punishment to be meted out to their persecutors. This is a fulfillment of Revelation 2:26-27 and also of Psalm 149.

Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud on their beds (couches). Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; to execute vengeance on the nations (unsaved) and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment - this honor have all His saints. Ps. 149:5-9

This scripture may also be applied to the investigative judgment of the saints.⁷

The two resurrections

The second resurrection

But the rest of the dead (those not resurrected at the Second Advent) did not live again until the thousand years were finished... V5

The rest of the dead did not rise till the end of the thousand years. V5 RSV

At the end of the one thousand years there will be second resurrection, the resurrection of the unjust. Jesus alluded to this:

*Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those that have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.
John 5:28, 29*

⁶ Many translations of Revelation 20:4 read as if there were only one group singled out - the end-time group who are involved in the final conflict with the beast. These are described as "beheaded". However Uriah Smith claims that the Greek cannot be understood in that way. See his book, *Thoughts on Daniel and Revelation*, (Battle Creek, MI: International Tract Society, 1886), 746.

⁷ E.G. White, *Early Writings*, (Washington, DC.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1882), 52-53.

This means that all those who are dead when Jesus comes will be resurrected. No matter who we are, we are coming back from the dead. We have no say about it. This is an awe-inspiring truth. No matter how or where we have been interred after death, we will be recreated in a split second of time to stand again upon the earth. However, we do have a choice as to when we come back – whether in the resurrection of life or in the resurrection of condemnation. There are two resurrections. Revelation Chapter 20 tells us that the two resurrections are a thousand years apart. At the Second Advent – the beginning of the thousand years is the resurrection to life.

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection... V6

But the second resurrection is a resurrection to condemnation. It is vital that we make the right decision while we have life. As the Lord reminds us:

Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.
2 Corinthians 6:2

...Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion...
Hebrews 3:7, 8

He who has the Son has life and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:12

...whoever believes in Him...has everlasting life. John 3:16.

This is why it is vital that we make our peace with God and let Him control our lives. Eternal life is too precious to lose. The Creator does not want anyone to be lost. *Why will you die?* He asks. Everyone chooses his own destiny - the resurrection to life at the Second Advent or the resurrection to condemnation at the end of the millennium.

The problem of Revelation 20:5b solved

...This is the first resurrection. V5

Revelation Chapter 20:5 has caused difficulty to some because at first glance, it appears to read that the resurrection of the dead at the close of the millennium is the first resurrection. The answer to this problem is best solved by checking other translations of verses 4-6.

They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection. (KJV)

They came to life and reigned along with Christ for a thousand years, (as for the rest of the dead, they did not come to life till the thousand years were completed). This is the first resurrection. (Moffat)

They were restored to life and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (The rest of the dead were not restored to life till the thousand years were ended). This is the first resurrection. (Twentieth Century NT)

The Good News Bible and Fenton likewise place the sentence in parenthesis, indicating that the first resurrection concerns those referred to in Verse 4 who live and reign with Christ

The first resurrection

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection...

This indicates that only the saints of God are involved in the first resurrection. Notice the reason why we are blessed if we participate in this resurrection.

...Over such the second death has no power...

The second death is annihilation at the hands of God. It is death that results from the fire that comes down from God out of heaven and devours the unsaved (v9). From the first death there is a return. From the second death there is no return. It is the wages of sin. It is separation from God. It is being blotted out of existence forever. "They shall be as though they had never been" (Obadiah 1:16). The fires of God's wrath have no effect on those who are raised at the Second Advent.

At the first resurrection the believer is raised with a body that is vastly different from the body he now possesses. As the apostle Paul declared:

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It (the body) is sown (buried) in corruption; it is raised in incorruption (it can no longer decay), it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory (a glorious body): it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. I Corinthians 15:42-44.

The body after the first resurrection is immortal, impervious to age and decay.

We shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound (at the Second Advent) and the dead shall be raised incorruptible...for this corruptible (body) must put on incorruption and this mortal (subject to death) must put on immortality (power over death). I Corinthians 15:51-53.

The spiritual body is still a body of flesh and bones but it is not subject to the power of the natural elements. It is a body that is able to pass through outer space to the kingdom of heaven and dwell in the presence of God who is as a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). A wonderful future awaits those who will rise in the first resurrection.

Priestly role of the saints

...but they shall be priests of God and of Christ...

Christ's priestly ministry ceases at the close of probation. Thereafter intercession and mediation will be no more so we need to discover how the saints' priestly ministry will occur. One aspect has already been referred to above, that is the investigation of the records of the unsaved and the determination of their degree of punishment. Christ and the twenty-four elders conduct the pre-advent investigative judgment of the saints from 1844 onwards.⁸ During the millennium the saints are involved with Christ in an investigative judgment of the unsaved.⁹

⁸ See Revelation 4:4, 5:8-10.

⁹ E.G. White, *Early Writings*, 290-291.

In Scripture we find that a priest had three main functions: to offer sacrifices, to make intercession and to teach. In the hereafter there will be no need for sacrifices or for intercession. This leaves only one priestly function - the role of a teacher. Scripture indicates that the perfect beings of other worlds do not fully understand the plan of salvation. There are even

...things which angels desire to look into. 1 Peter 1:12

One of the occupations of the redeemed will be to teach unfallen beings the truth of salvation. The redeemed will be the only ones who have experienced the grace of God in being redeemed from the thralldom of sin. What a story we will be able to tell. We suggest that we will have audiences of millions and we will have immortal, tireless bodies and perfect memories. What a privilege and a future await the redeemed.

...and shall reign with Him (Christ) a thousand years. V6

Some claim that there must be living people on earth for the saints to be able to reign. This is the objection that is raised against the view that the earth, during the millennium, is empty, void and waste. However Scripture tells us that the saints are with Christ in heaven and are living and reigning with him (refer v4). Because Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, wherever He is present He is always reigning. Therefore the saints with Christ in heaven will also reign as kings and priests.

The Third Advent

Christ and the saints return

In the Gospels, Jesus declared that all the dead will rise at the voice of the Son of God. (John 5:28) This means that Christ must return to the earth again at the end of the millennium to accomplish the resurrection of the unsaved. This event is often called the Third Advent. It is then that Christ returns from heaven to earth, bringing all His people with Him.

The plan of salvation is built upon three advents of Christ: the first at Bethlehem, the second when He comes in glory, and the third at the end of the millennium. Some Christians have become confused over this concept and whole churches have been divided over it. Some believe Christ returns at the beginning of the millennium, others at the end. The truth is that Christ returns both at the beginning and at the end of the thousand years.

The prophet Zechariah alluded to the Third Advent:

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming...His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives...and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two...making a very large valley...Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You. Zechariah 14:1, 4-5¹⁰

This passage necessarily refers to the Third Advent because at the Second Advent Christ remains in the air. The saints are caught up to meet Him there and return with Him

¹⁰ The predictions of Zechariah applied initially to literal Israel after they returned from Babylonian captivity. Because those predictions were not fulfilled to Israel, they now apply to spiritual Israel in the end time. Some local details are irrelevant when applied to spiritual Israel. The predictions of Zechariah like a number of other Old Testament predictions, are conditional in nature (see Zechariah 6:15).

to His Father's house, to the *many mansions*. At the Third Advent Christ will stand on the earth, on the Mount of Olives at Jerusalem, the mountain will split in two and a great plain will be formed.

The New Jerusalem established on earth

The plain is created because when Christ returns with His people, the New Jerusalem also descends to earth.¹¹

...I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Revelation 21:2

The New Jerusalem comes to rest on the plain and becomes the capital city of the new earth. Zechariah's declaration that *the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You* cannot refer to the Second Advent because at that time Christ comes for His saints. This time He comes with them, and as He descends He calls from the dust all whom God has rejected. It is the resurrection of damnation – a solemn event.

Satan released

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison
V7

Satan is imprisoned on earth by the circumstances that occur at the Second Advent of Christ. This event depopulates the earth. The translation of the saints to heaven and the destruction of the unsaved remove all human life from this world and turn it into a *bottomless pit*, or abyss. On this planet Satan will be figuratively bound.

The release of Satan signifies a reversal of the circumstances that bound him. It indicates the restoration of life to this planet and the repopulation of the earth with God's people.

The resurrection of the unsaved

At this time the unsaved of all ages are resurrected and the earth will be teeming with multiplied billions of resurrected people. One wonders how earth could hold them, but it will be for only a short season. The exact length of time is not revealed. Scripture declares that after this resurrection Satan will:

...and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle...

Gog and Magog

The Revelator has typically borrowed the term *Gog and Magog* from the Old Testament. In Ezekiel Chapters 38 and 39 Gog and Magog is the term used to describe the vast combination of the enemies of ancient Israel that Satan would use to invade and attempt to destroy literal Israel. Thus Gog and Magog represent the vast conglomeration of the

¹¹ A.P. Cooke, *New Heaven! New Earth! All things new!*

enemies of God and the use of this term is significant in Revelation Chapter 20 as will be shown below.¹²

...will go out to deceive the nations...

This passage reveals that the unsaved will be raised up in the same condition as they died. They will succumb to the temptations of evil, that is, to Satan. On the other hand, God's people, who are raised in the first resurrection perfect and immortal, will be impervious to evil. Satan will have no influence upon them. We will show later that there is an important purpose regarding this point.

...to gather them together to battle...

This battle is not amongst the unsaved. It is against the Holy City, the home of the saints. When they see the glorious New Jerusalem, somehow Satan deludes the unsaved into believing it is rightfully theirs, just as he deluded a third of the angels in the very beginning. He deceives them into thinking that they can take possession of it. When one visualizes the multiplied billions who will be marshaled under the great generals of the past who have resisted God, it will seem that nothing could prevent them from capturing and possessing the city.

...whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city... V8,9

Why a second resurrection?

Here is a tremendous scene. The unsaved of all the ages are marshaled, organized, deceived and deluded. Some people may ask why God would allow this to occur. If the destiny of all these teeming millions is eternal death, why raise them a second time?

There are several reasons. Perhaps the greatest is that most of us believe that if people were given another chance they would not make the same mistakes again. We know that there is good in every person, as well as bad. Most of us believe that if circumstances were different for many individuals their lives would take a different course, and if the unsaved were given another opportunity they probably would not make the same fatal choices.

There is another reason. Among unbelievers there are many wonderful people with delightful dispositions. Outwardly they do no harm, they never become involved in anything dubious and they are excellent citizens. However they have never acknowledged Christ or made a personal decision to follow Him and Scripture teaches that only those who truly belong to God will be saved. Yet this type of person has never obviously resisted or defied God. Perhaps the sinless worlds might wonder about His decision to exclude them from the kingdom.

In the second resurrection God's wisdom and justice is demonstrated to the whole universe and to the saints. The fact that all the unsaved rise up – including those who have never publicly resisted Christ - shows the universe where these seemingly wonderful people really stand. As Jesus said, *He who is not with Me is against Me* (Matt 12:30). The beings of the whole universe behold Satan among these people. They see the unsaved succumb to his deceptions and publicly take their stand with him against

¹² A.P. Cooke, *Gog and Magog – Must Russia invade Israel to fulfil Ezekiel 38 and 39?* (Sydney: Self-published, 1985).

God. What was secretly in their hearts in this life is publicly brought to light in the final judgment. The universe is assured that when God kept these people out of heaven at the Second Advent, He made the right decision. His wisdom and justice are validated. He never makes a mistake. In the words of the patriarch Abraham, *Will not the judge of all the earth do right?*

Imagine the scene. Every individual that has ever lived will stand on the earth. It will be the one and only time that all of earth's people from Adam's time onwards will exist simultaneously. The leading lights of history will be there. Those who are outside the city will be able to see the saints of God within. Many will see their own loved ones who chose to serve Christ and whom they ridiculed and despised. They will see them in their glorious eternal state. Imagine how they will curse themselves in remorse, in bitter disappointment when they see what they have lost. As Jesus declared

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. Luke 13:28, 29

On the other hand, those who have been faithful to Christ will be able to look outside the city and see those who opposed, ridiculed and persecuted them for their faith in Christ. They will be overwhelmed with gratitude to God for helping them make the right decision and for keeping them faithful.

Destruction of the unsaved

The next point to notice is that after the unsaved surround the city to capture it,

... fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. V9

This ends the first scene of the final judgment.

The final judgment

The Revelator continues to apply the principle of repetition and enlargement. He now repeats part of the scene, enlarging it and including more detail. John now portrays the final judgment in all its awe and solemnity.

I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. v11

All stand before God

When the vast unsaved throng surround the city, suddenly above it there appears the great white throne of judgment with Christ seated upon it. Every eye is riveted upon the Judge and they stand before Him, as it were, petrified.

...every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.
(Margin: subject to the judgment of God) *Romans 3:19.*

So awe-inspiring, so overwhelming is the scene that it seems as though heaven and earth have disappeared. The unsaved are subjected to the penetrating gaze of the holy and omnipotent God. They are oblivious to their earthly surroundings as their past lives flash before them.

Life records are revealed

And I saw the (resurrected) dead, small and great, standing before God; and the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life; and the dead were judged according to their works, by those things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it; and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. v12

It seems that across the heavens, like a movie on a mammoth screen, every individual views a no-holds-barred panorama of their past life which is also exposed to the whole universe. Individuals see themselves in the light of the love of God and the sufferings of Christ on the cross on their behalf. We can picture the scene, with the saints inside the city and the unsaved outside.

When the life record of the saints is revealed all that is displayed is their righteous lives. The universe will see only goodness because their sins, their failures and their unrighteousness have been blotted out. They have accepted the blood of Jesus Christ which alone can cleanse from sin. How incredibly grateful they will be that on earth they applied the blood of Christ, and faithfully followed Him! How they will bless Him that in this dramatic, awesome experience, the universe will witness nothing adverse to them.

One thing is certain - we will all be part of this scene. We will either be inside the city or beyond its walls. There will be nowhere to hide.

Imagine how embarrassed we would feel if a movie of our secret sins were publicly displayed. The sin records of those outside the city will be portrayed before the universe. All their ugly secrets will be revealed. The good things that they have done will not even be mentioned.¹³ Their noble deeds will have been blotted out, leaving no record of any righteousness. Sins are only recorded for those who have refused to accept Christ (see John 3:18).

The unsaved acknowledge their guilt

When the unsaved see themselves as they really are, Scripture declares:

*As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.
Romans 14:11*

Note the significance of this passage. When the unsaved see themselves as they really are, every one will bend the knee and confess to God. In this present life, only a few knees bow to God and only a few lips confess Christ. But then the unsaved will bend the knee and confess to God that He is righteous, loving and just. They will admit that He is right and that they are wrong and deserving of destruction.

¹³ See Ezekiel 18:24, 33:12, 13, 18.

Why it is too late for the lost

There stand the lost, facing annihilation. Some will wonder why God could not now save them. After all, they have humbled themselves and confessed. But this has occurred under compulsion. In character they are still the same. If God saved them now heaven would be misery for them.

One cannot enjoy God or spiritual things unless one has been born again, unless one has experienced a transformation of mind and character. Therefore, for God to save the lost now would be too big a risk. God is determined that evil will never rise again so He will only redeem those whom He can trust. He can only save those who love Him and who demonstrate supreme confidence in Him, no matter what. This is why He has been so patient over the six thousand years of the reign of evil.

The lake of fire

For the sake of the universe a tragic but necessary scene now takes place.

...fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. ... And they were judged, (punished) each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades (the grave) were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. Revelation 20:9b, 13-14.

The lake of fire is this planet burning. The fire that comes down from God not only consumes the unsaved, but it also melts the crust of the whole earth and it becomes a blazing mass. The earth is purified.

...the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ... the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire and the elements will melt with fervent heat. 2 Peter 3:10-12.

This mighty consummation is the lake of fire mentioned in Scripture. However the fate of the unsaved is not eternal torment. It is annihilation - the second death, from which there is no recovery.

...they shall be as though they had never been. Obadiah 1:16.

And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. V15

All those who suffer this tragic fate have chosen it. This is why the Lord pleads:

Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts... Hebrews 3:15

...Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 2 Corinthians 6:2

In Proverbs 11:31 Scripture declares that both the righteous and the ungodly will be *recompensed* (or rewarded) *on the earth*. This is fulfilled for the unsaved when they are consumed in the fire which purifies the earth. It will be fulfilled for the righteous when they are rewarded with an inheritance in the earth made new.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5

But the (atmospheric) heavens and the earth which are now preserved (in existence) by the same word are reserved for fire until the day of judgment (punishment) and perdition (destruction) of ungodly men. 2 Peter 3:7

Satan's fate

Let us go back now to verse 10.

The devil, who deceived them (the unsaved), was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:10

As shown in Revelation 19:20 there is also a lake of fire at the Second Advent in which the beast and the false prophet will be cast. We suggest that this lake of fire has a spiritual application.¹⁴ However some believe that it is formed by the flaming fire that comprises the glory of Jesus Christ at His return. This fire will envelop the whole planet.

Our God shall come and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him. He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth, that he may judge His people. "Gather my saints together to Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." Ps. 50:3-5.

...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he comes in that Day, to be glorified in his saints...
2 Thessalonians 1:7-10

And then the lawless one (man of sin) will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 2 Thessalonians 2:8 (Also see Appendix A).

In the Greek rendering of Revelation 20:10, the word *are* is missing. It reads:

...the lake of fire...where the beast and false prophet, (and the devil) will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The translators supplied the word *are* to make sense but in the light of Revelation 19:20 we believe the supplied word should be *were*, that is *where the beast and the false prophet were* (at the Second Advent).

Meaning of forever and ever

We may question whether the words *day and night forever and ever* in Revelation 20:10 substantiate the doctrine of eternal torment. However this term is a Jewish idiom which denotes continuity, but not necessarily lasting for eternity.

The term *forever and ever* is a Jewish idiomatic expression which implies continuity, or as long as life exists. However the length of time is dependent upon that to which it is applied. When it is applied to God and the saints' future existence it means "eternity" but when it is applied to other items it means as long as life continues.

¹⁴ In discussing Revelation 19:20 in Topic 31 - *Christ triumphant* - we showed that the lake of fire into which the beast and the false prophet will be cast is a spiritual lake of fire. They will be consumed by the burning anger of their supporters who will turn on them when they realize how the beast and the false prophet have deluded and used them.

For example:

1. The Hebrew servant's ear lobe was bored through to indicate that he was to be a servant *forever*, meaning as long as he lived.
2. King David was king over Israel *forever* (1 Chronicles 28:4), but that period of time amounted to forty continuous years (1 Chronicles 29:27).
3. Jonah was in the whale's belly *forever* (Jonah 2:6). Actually it was three days and three nights, but it was continuous (Jonah 1:17).

Other scriptures reveal that Satan will finally be consumed and that this will be enacted in the sight of the saved. As Isaiah declared:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer... yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the sides of the Pit. Those who see you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying, 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms; who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners?' Isa. 14:12, 15-17

This passage suggests that finally Lucifer (Satan) will be compelled to materialize as a man and will become an object of curiosity and astonishment as God's people gaze upon him. Then before their very eyes the Lord will begin Satan's annihilation. Under the title of King of Tyre - its invisible king - the Lord addressed Satan as follows:

You were the anointed cherub (angel) who covers... You were on the holy mountain of God... you were perfect in thy ways... till iniquity was found in you. ...I destroyed you, O covering cherub... I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, that they might gaze at you... I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all who saw you. All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; you shall become a horror, and shall be no more forever. Ezekiel 28:14-19

The saints observe Satan's destruction

Undoubtedly there is great significance in the method God uses to destroy Satan. Not only will this be a display of justice, but it could also bring assurance and comfort to the redeemed. They will witness the complete annihilation of their great enemy as well as God's. Satan's dying sufferings will undoubtedly continue for more than just a day, for he will be tormented *day and night*. On the other hand, while many of the unsaved will meet their end in a split second of time, others in justice will suffer longer, because all are judged (punished) *according to their works* (verse 13). One thing is certain: sin and sinners will no longer exist.

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven; and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the LORD of hosts, that will leave them neither root nor branch. ... You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day that I do this," says the LORD of hosts. Malachi 4:1, 3

Satan is the root of all evil and his followers are the branches.

Then Death and Hades (grave) were cast into the lake of fire... v14

Graves exist in the earth and when the purifying fires of God melt and dissolve the earth's crust this will be fulfilled. All the graveyards - the realm of death - will be destroyed forever.

A new heaven and a new earth

Now the final scene appears. Immediately after the fire has done its work, John records:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea...And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death nor sorrow nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold I make all things new."... Revelation 21:1, 4, 5

The renewed earth will become the eternal home of God's people. This hope, this future, is worth living for and it is worth dying for.

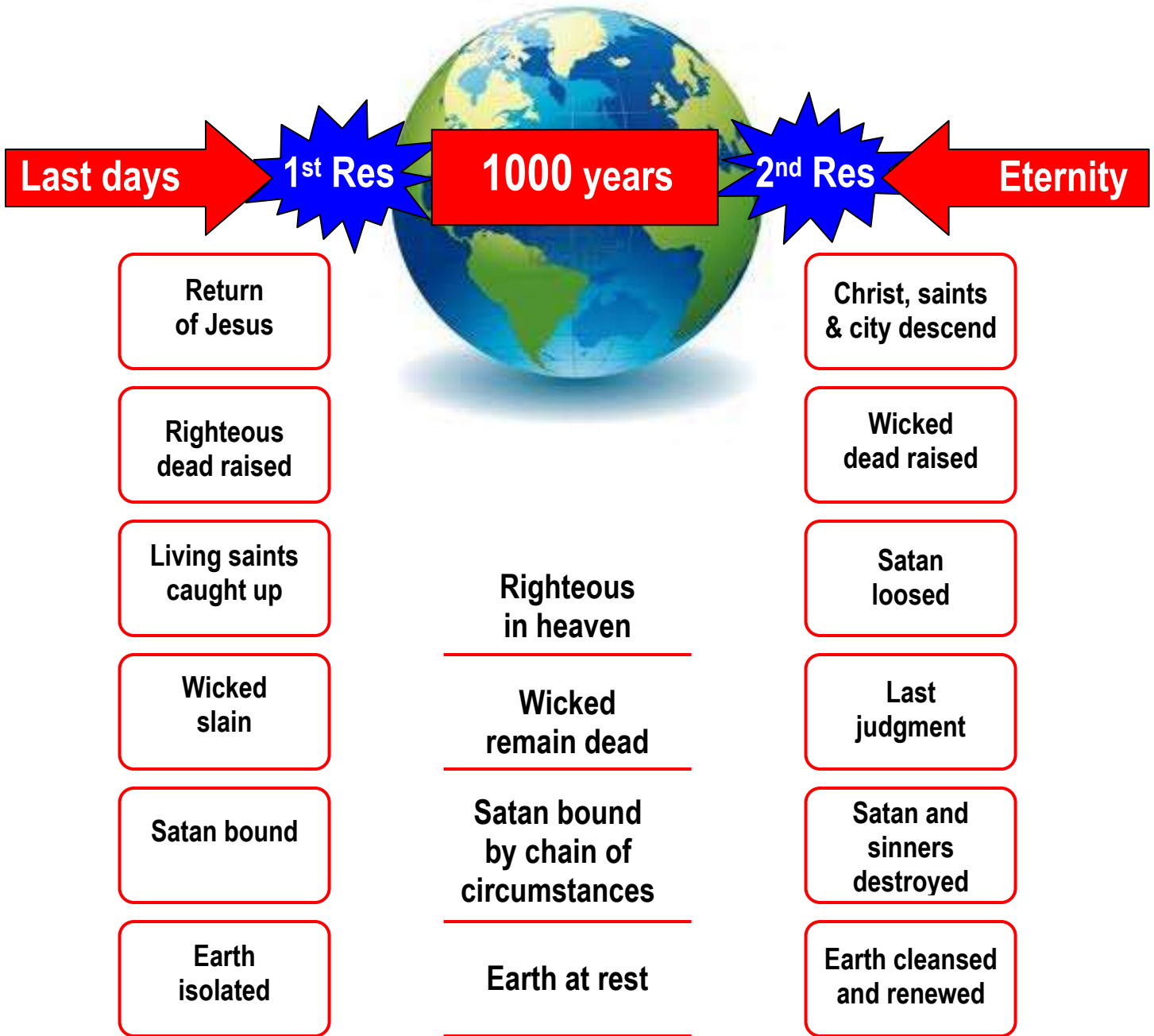
Appendix A – A false claim

And then the lawless one (man of sin) will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 2 Thessalonians 2:8

Some claim that the man of sin (*the lawless one*) is Satan and not the papacy. The following points show that the description given by the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 cannot apply to Satan.

1. Before the man of sin is revealed there will be a *falling away* or apostasy in the church. This apostasy was yet future when the apostle Paul wrote. Satan's apostasy however, was revealed before the creation of the world when there was war in heaven, etc.
2. The man of sin would *sit as God in the temple of God* (the Christian church) *showing himself* (publicly displaying) *that he is God*. Satan has never sat in the Christian church publicly posing as God. He is the invisible Antichrist, whereas the papacy is the visible Antichrist whose leader sits in the temple of God.
3. The man of sin will be destroyed with the brightness of Christ's Second Coming. Satan, however, will not be destroyed at the Second Advent nor at the Third Advent, but after the final judgment. His destruction will be effected by a fire beginning to burn within him which will slowly consume him from within. (See Ezekiel 28:18).
4. The man of sin is *according to the working of Satan*. In other words, he is inspired by Satan. He has Satan's spirit, but he is not Satan in person.

Appendix B – Sequential events occurring at and after the conclusion of human history



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