

Lesson Eight

(20:7-15)

THE LAMB AND THE SPIRITUAL CONSUMMATION

The author *does* believe in an historical, literal, second advent of Christ. Perhaps some readers had begun, to this point, to wonder. But, you see, that is because so many eschatological presuppositions and so much contemporary eschatological literature insists on a literal, pre-millennial interpretation for the book of Revelation. Any hermeneutical approach contrary to that is considered “liberal, modernistic, and unbelieving.” People who have *never studied* the Revelation think this way because the literal, pre-millennial theory has been propogated and promoted so widely and so popularly. The pre-millennial view has provided a fertile seed-crop for numerous science-fiction books and movies.

The Lord is coming again. But not according to any schedule set up by a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6 (plus “X” amount of data from Old Testament and the rest of the New Testament thrown together). As noted in the previous lesson, John leaps over more than one thousand years from Revelation 20:6 to 20:7. From one verse to the next there is a “gap” of a symbolic “thousand years.” With Revelation 20:7, therefore, we begin from a whole new reference point in time. The prophet has “shortened his perspective.” From the victory of the church over the

Roman empire (beginning of the “thousand years”), he focuses immediately down to the future to the second coming of Christ and the final judgment. But does the Bible tell us any times or signs as to when that will be? No! Who knows when the Lord will come again? No one—not even the angels nor the Son! The emphasis we look for, then, in the remainder of the book is not on times or seasons, but on meaning and application for our lives now.

Destiny of Satan (20:7-10)

7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison ⁸and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

v. 7 **And when the thousand years are ended . . .** — As noted in the previous lesson, we believe the “thousand years” not to be intended literally. It represents a long, complete (as long as God’s purposes need) time beginning with the victory of the Lamb over Rome. Since the Lamb’s victory over Rome is already more than a thousand years old, we should not understand the number to be literal. The main concern of this passage is not time anyway, but the *revelation* of Satan’s ultimate defeat and the absolute victory of the saints of God. If the Lamb reveals victory, who needs a time schedule? It is as good as done! He is the Faithful and True Word of God.

When the purpose of God no longer needs severe restrictions upon Satan (completion of a “thousand years”) God will loose Satan to some extent. It is clear, as we have already noted, that Satan is *always bound* in some relative sense; Satan is never completely free from the sovereignty of God and able to stand as an equal to God. So, whatever “loosing” Satan may enjoy, it is not complete or full. In Rev. 20:3 it was stated Satan would be loosed for “a little while” (Gr. *mikron chronon*, micro-time). What is a “little time”? Looked at from God’s perspective, it may involve centuries of man’s time. In Revelation 12:7-12, after the devil’s defeat in “the heavenly” and his being cast down upon the “earth,” we learned the devil came in great wrath for he knew his time was “short.” The “short time” there meant the 350 years (more or less) the devil still had to use the Roman empire against the church of the Lamb, (see comments there). The devil learned

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that from Daniel's prophecies. It must be frustrating for him to know that God holds the "times" of the devil in his sovereign hands so completely. Whatever the devil does and when he does it are all permitted by God. And when God gets ready to imprison the devil forever, he will be imprisoned—no matter how wide his influence in the world and no matter how circumstances may appear to the world.

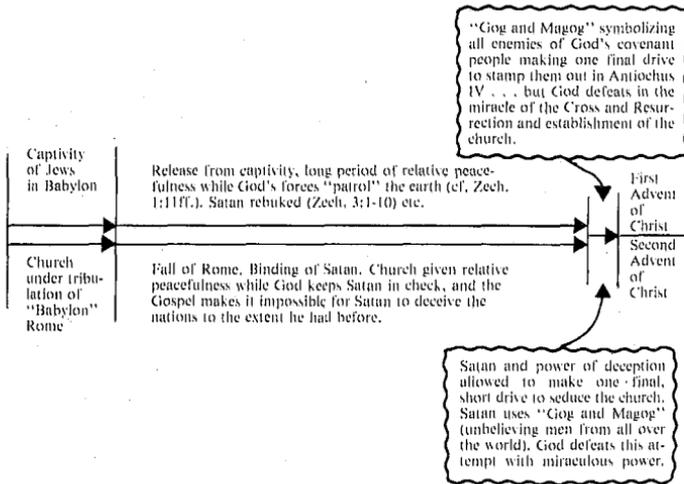
v. 8 . . . will come out to deceive the nations . . . — The spirit of Christian martyrdom and missions overcame Satan and he was bound by the Word of God. The church survived and conquered Rome, (Satan's greatest tool), through the spirit of faithfulness to the Lamb that caused them to "love not their lives even unto death" (12:11). When such a spirit of devotion and discipleship no longer distinguishes God's people, the restraining power of Satan is gone; Satan is loosed (relatively) once more; his work of *deception* (Gr. *planesai* to lead astray) will have room once again to flourish. It is significant to note that the fundamental attack of Satan is to deceive. He has no other power. More deception is accomplished by lies and false teachings than by brute physical force.

Satan will find himself loosed apparently at some point in time future to today. A time will come, apparently, when the whole world will appear to be on the side of Satan and the church about to be surrounded or besieged by a world in the throes of deception. Satan no longer has one great political power to use, but he does deceive millions to his cause from all sources, from nations all over the globe ("four corners of the earth"). This is *not* Armageddon—that was Rome's fall (see comments 16:14-16). It is the same war, but a different battle. It is the war that started before Eden when the devil and other angels, trapped by pride, left their appointed places. For purposes known only to God, he has allowed that war to rage through the historical centuries of mankind. The spiritual perfection of man is undoubtedly one reason God has allowed the war to continue. But during the war God has accomplished so many undeniable and unimpeachable victories over his adversary that ultimate conquest is a foregone conclusion. The most emphatic of these victories (and the one to which all others point) is the victory of God's Son at the cross and the empty tomb.

John appropriates the imagery for this great struggle from the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel (ch. 38-39). The battle of God's people with "Gog and Magog" is symbolic in the prophet Ezekiel and not literal. Although Ezekiel's prophecy is predicting an actual struggle between the forces of evil and God's covenant people, the *language* used must be symbolic because a literal interpretation of Ezekiel's language would involve physical impossibilities. Ezekiel shows that "Gog and Magog" symbolized all the heathen enemies of God's people from the time of the former prophets to the Roman empire by identifying "God and Magog" as ". . . he of whom I (God) spake in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, that

prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring these against them . . .” (Ezek. 38:17). No prophet before Ezekiel ever named “Gog and Magog” but they did speak of enemies from different “corners” of the world coming against Israel and they predicted God would defeat them. We believe that although the initial aim of Ezekiel’s “Gog and Magog” prophecy may be predicting the struggle of faithful Jews against Antiochus IV (171-165 B.C.) and their victory over him, the ultimate goal of Ezekiel’s prophecy is the victory of the Messianic kingdom over the worst attack that all the combined forces of evil and the world could bring against it. That would be the assassination of the Messiah himself and the attempt to stamp out his church. That is “Gog and Magog” of Ezekiel! This interpretation would fit into the whole symbolic Messianic picture portrayed by Ezekiel’s glorious Temple, glorious land, glorious “terumah,” glorious priesthood and kingdom (Ezek. ch. 40-48).

We believe John is using “Gog and Magog” simply as symbols to give his readers some idea (from the Old Testament imagery) of how wide spread and intense this last assault of the forces of evil will be. John’s use of Old Testament imagery would be like a secret code to the “uninitiated” (heathen who did not know the Old Testament), but would certainly provide a graphic picture for the believers. The main point John wishes to communicate is the complete *victory* of God over the devil on behalf of his covenant people (the church). That is exactly what Ezekiel was portraying for the Old Covenant people in his vision of “Gog and Magog.” The two prophecies form an interesting parallel. That is because the Old Testament is typical, in practically all its historical events, of the New Testament. This parallel is best seen in the chart below:



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This is definitely a spiritual battle. It is a battle of the mind. There is not one word of any physical weaponry being used here. The devil is smart enough to know that making martyrs of Christians by force, persecution and bloodshed is definitely a losing battle. He knows that the only sure way to conquer men is to deceive them. The Christian's warfare is mental and spiritual (cf. Eph. 6:10ff.; II Cor. 10:3ff.). This is a great mass of mankind scattered all over the world ("Gog and Magog") and not just one "antichrist" located in the Middle East or Russia. And they do not, of their own planning, call upon the devil to help them—they are, in fact, *deceived* by the devil into assisting him. Just how and when this is done John does not elaborate.

vv. 9-10 And they . . . surrounded the camp of the saints . . . but fire came down from heaven and consumed them . . . — John does not mean to say that all the Christians from all over the world will be gathered at one geographical location and physically surrounded by the devil and those he has deceived to assist him. He simply means to say the church-universal will be *besieged by deception*. The "camp of the saints" is another way of saying "the church" (cf. Heb. 13:11, 13). The "beloved city" is also the church ("Zion," see Heb. 12:22; Gal. 4:26). The church of Christ could very well find itself at this time (whenever it is to be) existing in a society much like that described in Romans 1:18-32! What the church (individual Christians) must guard against are the powers of deception—false teaching, carnality and pride.

Whenever and whatever the nature of the struggle, God is set to deliver his church. And, as he destroyed the enemy Antiochus IV "without human hand" (Dan. 8:25), so he will deliver his church by divine intervention. Heaven consumes the enemies of God's saints. The divine hand of God defeated the world and delivered his redemptive nation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Power from on high established the church and protects the church even now. The gates of death cannot prevail against it. So, in the last analysis, God will consummate that deliverance by divine action direct from heaven. The church need not fear the worst the devil and his deceived millions may do; the church needs only to be faithful and God will deliver her just as surely as he delivered Jesus Christ from the tomb.

At the same time God delivers his church by direct divine action, he will also banish the devil (with those he has deceived) completely and forever into the lake of fire and brimstone. The devil will never again be released or loosed—not even relatively! The devil's incarceration in hell (where the beast and false prophet and those with their mark have already gone) is *forever* (Gr. *eis tous aionas ton aionon*, or, "unto the ages of the ages"). The word for *torment* in Greek is *basanizo* and means abrasiveness, struggle, torture. The words *aionas* and *aionon* are used to describe the existence of God (forever) and the duration of the saints in heaven (forever). We

assume the torment of the devil and the unsaved will last as long as God lasts. If there is to be a complete annihilation of the wicked, we cannot find it in the Bible.

Contrary to popular opinion, Satan does not rule over hell! He is an inmate and is to be tortured right along with all those deceived by him. He is no longer a *pretended* ruler; he never was a real ruler. He is now pictured as an eternal rebel-sufferer. He controls nothing, but is himself controlled. God created and reserved this eternal prison for the devil and his angels (cf. II Pet. 2:17; Jude 13; Mt. 25:41). It is the devil's inevitable destiny, and the destiny of all those who choose to trust his deceptions against God.

Destiny of Sinners (20:11-15)

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. ¹⁴Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; ¹⁵and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

v. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it . . . — Remember, this is a vision. There is no literal throne in heaven made of wood or gold. It is simply John describing spiritual realities in terms of the limitations of human experience. The throne was "great" and "white" to symbolize Absolute Sovereignty and Absolute Wisdom and Righteousness. This is the throne of God; it is not the throne of any human judge whether it be Caesar or some other human potentate. Any judgments issuing from this "great white" throne will be omnipotent and omniscient. There will be no mistakes, no deviations and no appeals from it. This judgment will be perfect, final and forever.

We have already dealt with the telescope-effect John is placing on history in this section. We have called it "shortened perspective." All earlier judgments in the book of Revelation dealt with the fall of the Roman empire. All through history God judges and destroys nations and forces which oppose his redemptive program in time and history. At the consummation of time and history God will judge each individual who has ever lived on earth. That is the judgment here depicted. John skips in time from the fall of Rome (20:1-6) to the second coming of Christ, the incarceration of

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Satan, and the final judgment (20:7-15) without telling what transpires between these two events except for the "loosing of Satan for a little while." Apparently John is expecting his readers to be encouraged by the fall of the seemingly invincible Rome that the consummation of all history was just as certain. Most certainly John is given this revelation of the consummation to encourage the saints of all ages that eventually and inexorably, justice will be done: wickedness will be eternally punished and righteousness eternally rewarded.

Who is sitting upon this great white throne? John does not say. Scriptures could be cited for both God and Jesus (the Lamb) (see the following verses: Rev. 16:5, 7; 18:8, 20; 19:2; 19:11; John 5:22, 27; Matt. 25:31ff.; Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 14:10; II Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:1). Perhaps it is both the Father and Son in One Person (see Jn. 10:30; 14:10). Whatever the case the judgment will be that in which both Father and Son are participating and agreeing.

Creation will disappear when God appears to confront it. The Greek word *ephugen* is translated *fled* away (the English word *fugitive* comes from that Greek word). Physical matter has no power to exist in the presence of pure spirituality. Physical matter is transitory, temporary, and when its Creator decides it is no longer useful to him, it takes its leave. This corrupted creation will not stand in the awful presence of perfect holiness. When it comes to a "face down" corrupted creation must disappear. The Greek word *prosopou* is translated *presence* but literally means *face*. God told Moses no man could see God's face and live (Ex. 33:20). Peter writes that at the great judgment day of God the heavens will pass away with a great rushing sound, and the *elements* (Gr. *stoicheion*, the rudimentary elements of matter) will be dissolved with fire and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up (II Pet. 3:10). This present creation was declared futile by God (Rom. 8:18-25) so God's plan is to destroy it immediately at the time of judgment and to create a new place for spiritually minded followers of the Lamb.

v. 12 And the dead were judged by what was written in the books . . . — John now sees in a vision the dead standing before the throne of God for final judgment. This is all the dead from Adam to the end of the world (cf. Jn. 5:28; Acts 24:15; Ro. 2:6, 16; II Cor. 5:10). It is both small (non-celebrities) and great (celebrities). It will include the supposed powerful dead of the world (Caesars, Hitlers, Stalins) and the weak. Those who are alive at the coming of Christ in judgment will be there too for the living will not go to eternity before the dead go (cf. I Thess. 4:15-18) or vice versa. John's vision of this mass of total humanity "standing" is to be understood of figurative terms. Perhaps God will have already given all humanity celestial or immortal bodies designed to fit their specific destinies. Will God judge all humanity in one huge audience or will he have all human

beings stand or appear before him one by one? We do not know for sure, but the latter seems to fit II Cor. 5:10.

What are the books? God does not need literal "books" or ledgers to keep a record of men's deeds. His mind is omniscient and infallible. "Books" is a word of human language to symbolize that every deed, every thought, every secret (Rom. 2:16) of every man is known and remembered by God. Now the Bible is clear that God can and will forget some things. God will "blot out" and "remember no more" the sins of men who have trusted in the atoning death of Jesus Christ on their behalf (cf. Psalms 51:1, 9; Micah 7:19; Isaiah 43:25; 44:22; Acts 3:19; Hebrews 8:12). Those who are in the book of life, also known as the Lamb's book of life, will not be judged by what is in the same "books" in which sinner's deeds are recorded. The sinner, who stubbornly insists on attempting to be justified by some law of human works, will be judged by that criterion. All who are will be weighed and found wanting (Daniel 5:24-28; Romans 2:12; James 2:10). There is none righteous without the substitution of Christ's death (Romans 3:10-31); all have sinned. And by law, shall no flesh be justified (Galatians 2:16). The sinful dead will be judged (sentenced and executed) according to what they have done—and what they have not done (James 4:17). The standard God will use is perfection. Anyone not found perfect, sinless, justified, will be unfit to abide in the presence of a perfect, sinless Father. Anyone who has refused the gracious offer of sinlessness through faith in Christ will be declared in rebellion and not eligible for citizenship under the rule of Christ.

Those who have accepted the atonement and justification provided by Christ through an exercise of their faith, will be found written in the book of life. This book of life is mentioned a number of times in the Bible (cf. Exodus 32:32ff.; Psalm 69:28; Isaiah 4:3; Malachi 3:16; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27). The ones who have washed their sins away by accepting God's gracious offer of the death of His Son in their place will be judged according to the good they have done. And although they will have forgotten some of the good things they have done (Matthew 25:37-40), the Lord will not forget (Hebrews 6:10). There is some indication that the Lord will reward His servants according to the exercise of their faithfulness in managing what he entrusted to them on earth (cf. Luke 16:10-12; 19:11-27; Matthew 25:14-30; I Cor. 3:10-15). All people who have ever lived will appear before the judgment throne of God, saint and sinner. The saint will appear to hear the acclaim of the God who promised him vindication for his faithfulness in suffering, his trust in Christ's merit for him, and his willingness to obey the revealed will of God when it seemed impossible, unpopular and costly. There it will be declared of the saint, by the Great Creator and Redeemer, "well done, you good and faithful servant, enter into the joys of your rest." The saint will appear at judgment to receive the inheritance Christ has for him which is beyond all comparison (II Cor. 4:16-18).

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v. 13 . . . Death and Hades gave up the dead in them . . . — The sea, Death and Hades (Hades is the intermediate state of the dead, whether in peace or torments, see Lk. 16:19-31). The "sea" may be symbolic of the total mass of living humanity (see comments on Rev. 13:1), or it may be speaking literally of the oceans of the earth. It appears John added these phrases simply to emphasize that wherever men may be, disembodied or in the body, they will be called forth to appear at the final judgment of God. None shall escape; none shall be overlooked. Now the final judgment will not determine whether one will go to heaven or hell. That will have been determined according to one's spiritual relationship at death (Jn. 3:18, etc.). The final judgment is to declare it, vindicate it, and finalize it. The final solution to sin and rebellion will be executed; the eternal and perfect circumstances for development of righteousness and love will be established.

v. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire — The experience known as Death and the experience known as Hades can have no part in eternal bliss. The only place left for those experiences is hell. Death is the experience of separation, alienation, irreconciliation, dissolution and disorder. The second death is the eternal experience of all the preceding torments. Hades is the experience of disembodiment and there can be no place for that in heaven. It is cast into hell to be part of the cumulative experience of all rebel sinners. This is God's final statement that he has given the Lamb power over these forces which frustrate and torment men in this life. The Lamb does as he pleases with them and it is his pleasure to ban them from the experience of the saved forever in hell. Alford writes, "As there is a second higher life, so there is also a second and deeper death. And as after that life there is no more death, so after that death there is no more life."

v. 15 and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire — At the final judgment there will be only two classes of humanity; the saved and the lost. Human beings will be either cast into the lake of fire or they will be found written in the book of life and *not* cast into the lake of fire. There will be no "in-between" categories. It is no wonder Jesus told the seventy disciples that they should not rejoice over supernatural powers exercised through them, but rejoice simply that their names were written in heaven (Lk. 10:20). Not all who exercise miraculous powers will go to heaven (Mt. 7:21-23). One does not have his name written in heaven by the mere fact that he is religious, does religious deeds, even miraculous religious deeds. One's name is written in heaven by "having the Son of God." The same apostle given this vision of the final judgment wrote: "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life" (I Jn. 5:11). Now this same epistle, called First John, tells us very plainly how we "have the Son"! (see I Jn. 2:3, 5, 6, 24; 3:19-24; 4:6-15).

APPREHENSION AND APPLICATION:

1. Why do some people think the whole book of Revelation is about the second coming of Christ?
2. Is the second coming of Christ mentioned in Revelation? Where?
3. When are the "thousand years" ended?
4. What is to happen when the thousand years end?
5. How long will Satan be loosed?
6. How "loose" will Satan be?
7. What will Satan attempt to do during his "little time"?
8. Why does God allow the devil to go on making war against the saints?
9. What do you think you will do if Satan's "loosing" comes while you are alive? Will you be deceived? Is there any way to withstand Satan's little time?
10. Why does John mention "Gog and Magog" in his Revelation?
11. What will God do about Satan's surrounding the camp of the saints?
12. What is going to be Satan's experience in hell? Will he be in charge?
13. Who will be judged by God at the great white throne?
14. Why does earth and sky flee from God's presence?
15. Why are all the dead judged by what is written in the "books"?
16. Will believers appear at judgment? Why?
17. How does one have his name written in the book of life?
18. What happens to those whose names are not written there? Do you really believe that?
19. Do you have any friends or relatives whose names are not written there? Have you talked with them about it?